

SON *of the*
WIND

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CHAMBERLAIN**

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SON OF THE WIND



Carron saw a shadow coming down the walk

SON OF THE WIND

By

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THE COAST OF CHANCE

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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CHAPTER I

THE MAN ON THE ROAD

I DON'T know anything about it," the man stubbornly insisted. His glance ran over the whole white- and black-spotted cañon, over the ardent blue horizon, over the buttes in front, swinging back like gates to show where the mountains began, and returned defiantly to Carron's face. "Don't even know there is such a thing," he concluded.

Carron couldn't help smiling. "You were very sure there was only a little while ago." He paused interrogatively, peering from the hood of the run-about. "Well, say you did overstate the facts, suppose you haven't seen it yourself—sure you don't know some one else who has seen it?"

"No, I don't!" he said loudly and sullenly. He gave the speaker a rapid, furtive glance. "I don't, and what's more, I tell you if I did I wouldn't let you know it—not if you gave me a thousand dollars!" He was working himself into a passion. Car-

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ron stretched his neck a little more eagerly, and his incredulous smile quickened with excitement. He looked straight through the resistance, the denials. For a moment he absorbed the aspect of that figure planted there in the white road; then risked the reins and got out of the runabout.

The fellow seemed ready either to strike him or to dart away, but Carron stood quite still. "Look here," he said persuasively, "we both talked a good deal last night, but you seem to think you said too much, and you think I want to take advantage of it. Well, I do. What you told me has taken my fancy, but I want to be on the square about it. Of course, I know you are not going to give information you are not supposed to give; but where's the harm in telling me who your friends are? Then, if they don't want to talk, let them say so, and that will be the end of it."

While he was speaking he had been walking leisurely forward, until, as he ended, he stopped just in front of his antagonist. He reached, took, and grasped the limp left hand, drawing it forward in front of him, by the warmth and energy of his own, forcing a nervous involuntary pressure from it. He released it, and it stayed as if hypnotized outstretched, palm up, with a gold piece of twenty dollars in it.

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The recipient of this equivocal coin looked at it nervelessly. His face had the overwhelmed expression of one who finds he has been led far when he thought himself standing firm. Then, as if in involuntary repudiation, his palm stiffened, his fingers spread, the money glimmered at the point of sliding through them—but Carron, with a clutch of his own, doubled the fingers to a fist.

"Hang on to it," he said reassuringly. "It's what we agreed on, isn't it? It hardly pays you for your trouble." Seeing his argument still hung fire he ended, "I'm afraid it's going to be a dry winter."

The man looked up at the sky, the light of which seemed to whiten the whole landscape, then downward at his worn shoes, then at his hand closed like a fist. Some reaction, physical as well as mental, had begun. His legs, planted in the posture of firmness, trembled, his eyelids twitched; when he spoke his voice sounded uncertain. "Try Rader's," he muttered without raising his eyes, "first turn to the left as you go ahead."

"Rader's, first turn to the left as you go ahead," Carron repeated, and felt amused. It was like a village direction. Here, where long distances led between mountains and immense sky, it sounded too scant. He hesitated, foot on the buggy step, but the aspect of the man on the road warned that fur-

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ther asking here would be useless. "Much obliged," he said, and got in. The sight of the forlorn figure in the uninhabited landscape gave him pause. "Can't I give you a lift a little farther along the road?"

Without raising his eyes the man violently shook his head.

"Well," Carron said cheerfully, "I suppose you know which way you're going." The reins tightened, the mare stepped out.

The man spoke behind him. "Remember, I haven't heard anything; I didn't say they'd seen it. I don't even know how much they know about it."

"I understand," Carron called back. "No one there is going to hear your name mentioned."

If he had felt the whiplash the fellow couldn't have flashed into keener anger. His face, already heavily flushed, took on a purplish, unhealthy color. As if it were a thing that could be hurt, with a violent gesture he threw the money from him. It shone and sank in deep dust.

Carron, with the reins taut in his hands, while the mare sped, stared back in astonishment. He wanted to laugh, yet he felt concerned. "Damn it all," he thought, "what sent him off at half-cock again? What did I say? What a fool! Hey, Hey!" he muttered encouragingly to the mare that, hot and fretted with delay, was dancing delicately

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sidewise; "why the devil do I always have creatures on my hands that are flying to pieces?"

He was irritated that money he had given should be thrown away, yet he felt pity, and a sort of responsibility for the man on the road, as he was inclined to feel for all beings weaker than himself. He drew the mare in to a slow undulating pace and looked behind him.

Dust, many times dry, stood up in a cloud, and in that haze he could make out something which a few minutes before might have been an upright human figure, but now had become more like an animal nosing for a scent, crouching close to the ground, making quick darts uncertainly here and there in the road. Carron watched with dubious amusement. "He'll not find it again—that's sure; as well hunt in a pit of ashes. Might go back and give him another." He consulted his watch, and his pockets. "No," he determined, "I'm too close nipped as it is—and besides, if he has misdirected me, as for all I know he probably has, he's only got what's coming to him."

But this last conclusion was put forth for comfort. He didn't believe it. He felt as certain that the fellow had spoken the truth then, as he had been sure, before, that he had lied. Those violent denials, the brazen way he had stood ready to eat his words—they had been but so many reassurances that the

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thing was real. And then, that last, scant direction—three words fairly squeezed out of his throat! Carron had the unusual sensation of seeing his chimera, his gauzy fable, which all day had led him like a mirage threatening each moment to melt into air, now suddenly grown possible to the imagination, palpable, almost solid.

A light and irresponsible pleasure quickened in his veins. The world had one more adventure left, dangerous enough, but not too serious. The figure of the man on the road, unpaid by his own act and vainly searching, receded from his mind. He was leaving it behind with the dusty high valley, the thin trees and the traveled roads. He was entering upon the unexpected and the unwanted. White grass was giving place to growth of pine, filling the sharpening cañon. Now he was plunged into trees; again, he emerged among strewn boulders with a sudden little lake like a burning-glass on the one hand. In the bright eye of this he saw himself and his fretful beast reflected, little creatures in a great landscape, creeping on a road which clung to the foot of the cliffs. Tremendous heat of mid-afternoon hung in the cañon, a white and sparkling light growing ghostly with distance. Straight before him, as if at the end of his journey, he saw the two rocks like gates flung open into some garden of mountains

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beyond, and from there, as from afar off, he heard the voice of an exhausted river. There was no other sound except the intermittent rattle of his guns in the wagon body, and the knocking of his horse's hoofs on the road. Not a cloud, not a bird's wing, nothing moved except his own shadow, black and little, at his feet. He welcomed the magnificent absence of his kind. It was solitude, but it was not desolation. The air was stimulating and vital. The cañon was peopled with curious forms of rock and tree—round towers, banners, and figures which, when confronted, were not figures. Yet at the first glimpse, to his fancy, they took always one shape. Twisted pine, sandstone, shard, the image in his mind flashed into the senseless stuff, animated it and melted. The procession of cliffs separated into high, round hills. Without his realizing, without his seeing how, before his eyes the trick was done. Above these nearer smaller eminences, higher, rockier crests multiplied. Faces of the half-gods in sandstone looked on him humorously from the sky; and far in front between the open gates appeared pale summits and divides, and highest of all, a peak like a little cloud.

It glimmered before him, scarcely seen before it was being shut away. The gates seemed closing upon it. The flank of a hill was gliding across his vision.

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The road had been endlessly turning around a great base of rock, and now he was aware that the cañon which had led straight before him, was dropping away to the right. This road of man, as if it dared not follow the highway of the gods, was perversely turning aside between the close, round slopes of two "sugar-loafs." Carron should have been ready for this. But he had been rather in the clouds. Now, he had to remember that unless Rader was the "old man of the mountains" himself he could not be found in that citadel of high peaks. It was in reason that the road would change, yet, in spite of reason, he felt put off from the main object of his quest, and he looked at the fresh prospect with suspicion.

It was a narrow glimpse, a mere passageway through into a different country, of lower sky-line and thicker, greater companies of trees; and square at the end of it, so close it seemed to close the gap, making a cul-de-sac, was a low, round eminence—hill rather than mountain—clothed complete in dusky green. He had scarcely time to see it, to note the distinctive air it had among the rougher outlines around it, like a personage in a crowd, before it was shut from sight in thickening branches, and the landscape became a soft, mysterious thing of forest. Olive-green and gray were on either side of him, brown underfoot. There was a diminishing of angles.

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to curves, of cliffs to gradual rises. The road was ascending, not abruptly, but with the long, scarcely discernible slope which indicates the general trend of the country. At intervals there was a look of openness among the trees, giving him fugitive expectations that the truthfulness of the man on the road was about to be vindicated. But the way led gradually up for an eternity without so much as a rabbit trail to interrupt the monotony of it; it looked more lonely and far less suggestive of life than the cañon, and the idea intruded more and more upon his mind that, after all, the fellow had misdirected him. The thought of a night under the open sky did not trouble him; but the thought that he had been mistaken in his man made him chafe. He had felt so sure, yet now he had to admit that his informer must have had every practical reason in the world for wanting to lead him astray. He remarked that the occasional shafts of sun which found him were changing from white to yellow; then that there was no longer any sun at all. A great shadow lay over everything, and the heat was changing to freshness. He took off his hat the better to feel the fine breath of the air.

Presently the monotonous climb was interrupted by an unexpected descent into a gully, or little cañon. He could see pools of water standing in an expanse

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of boulders, and connected by a slow, creeping thread of water.

If he must camp, he thought, this was the best place, water, and safe ground for a fire. But camp, or go back, or go on? He put his hand into his pocket, regretting that there were not three sides to a penny, and peered forward between the tree trunks at the other side of the bank to see in which direction his road led. At first it seemed to him that it cut away to the right, then that it led straight on before him. Then that it led two ways. He was rather afraid of being disappointed, but actually there was no doubt about it.

The other side of the creek gave him a clearer prospect. The road he had followed skirted around the base of a hill, the same hill, no doubt, that he had seen from afar, set castle-like across his path, but the first turn to the left, which he now turned into out of the wider track, addressed itself direct to the ascent, winding, narrow, steep and dim in the tunneled trees. Carron kept glancing from side to side of it, as if what he was searching for might at any moment start out on him through the flow of leaves. He was poised, ready for the next thing to happen, alert against surprise, though the trail of events he was following should double upon him as unexpectedly as the road, which, after plunging him

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around mountains and into cañons, was finally leading him up into the high, glimmering twilight of a pine forest. Successive chambers of yellow light and bluish shadow opened before him. The dimensions of his surroundings were decreasing. Trees became smaller; distances briefer down forest aisles; the sky, with its diminished blue, seemed closer to his head, and the silence was the only thing that opened more profoundly around him.

His mind, like a ready general, scouted over the probabilities of who and what in the shape of "Rader's" might be awaiting him, perhaps around the next turn of the track—a woodcutter's shack, or possibly a hunter's encampment. In spite of his readiness for anything, Carron experienced a lively sense of astonishment when, after a half mile of unbroken tree and shadow, he saw in front of him two gaunt, white gate-posts. To say there was a gate there would have been inexact. Whatever had swung between them once, only the rusty hinges of it remained, and, at one side on the ground, half buried in pine-needles, lay an arch-shaped piece of wood. Traces of whitewash showed upon it, and traces of what once might have been black lettering. The thing had an air of decaying sophistication, grotesque, melancholy, absurd, cast away here in the flourishing forest. The idea occurred to him

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that, instead of a woodman's shanty, he might be approaching some old, neglected country seat.

A flattening of the ascent into the almost level and a slight widening of the road ahead warned his eyes. At the far end of it he saw what seemed to be the loop of a drive. The pines thinned, and between their boughs he had glimpses of a house. The trees stopped at an abrupt clearing and immediately it was all before him—long, pale façade, long, naked piazza, and long, straight rows of windows, an austere, sharp-angled mass in the dark circle of the forest. Before he realized what it was, he knew it was nothing that he had expected. It was large, but not imposing, spacious but spare, like a place flung together for the merest utility of housing room. If that wing of the building extending to the left suggested in its proportions and weather-worn whitewash some kinship to the gate-posts, the main body of the house declared itself unhesitatingly new. After a moment's looking he recognized what it must be: one of those lesser hotels so frequent in the redwoods of the coast mountains, but here in this high isolation, as improbable as a pony cart or a tennis racket. He was astonished to find it existing here in the middle of this lopped-off clearing, with its drive made broad for the whirl of many wheels, unused, its long verandas empty, the

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shades of all the upper windows drawn. What sort of life went on in such places out of season he had never before reflected; but that there was living of some sort was now before him, for the house was far from shut up, and wide-flung doors and windows of the lower story vigorously breathed of agitated dust.

While he looked a tall woman with a white cloth over her head and a broom in her hand came out on the piazza. Seeing Carron, she put her hand to the cloth with involuntary deprecation. There was surprise in the gesture, but no confusion at the sight of a stranger. Something in her way of looking at him suggested that strangers were more usual with her than friends. He took the half turn of the drive and drew up at the steps.

"Did you want to see—" she began, but her faded voice left the question hanging in the air, as if there was more than one person he might have wanted.

"Mr. Rader," he finished for her; and, at that, a fresh surprise was added to her query. He saw her look him over from his bare head to his boots; from the horse between the shafts to the rifles in the body of the runabout; knew she was classing him; knew, too, that this was something he couldn't do with her. He guessed she was the proprietor of this establishment, but this failed to class her among

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hotel keepers. She eluded him, even while he saw her adding up his sum.

"Do you mind telling me what you want to see Mr. Rader about?" she said at last.

He had been expecting this, and was ready for it. "I am after deer," he explained. "I missed my guide at Beckwith—left word for him to join me at Mohawk, and came along. But I got on the wrong road somehow, and a chap I met a few miles below here told me that Raders might take me in over-night, and put me on the right road back in the morning."

She came forward to the edge of the porch and stood, leaning on her broom like a wand of office. She looked weary and scarcely interested. "We've closed for the season," she said. "Why don't you go down to Ferriers'? It's only half a mile along on the main road."

"But my mare is almost done, I shouldn't like to take her any farther to-night. Would Mr. Rader object to an informal boarder, even if it is a little out of season?"

"Oh, *he!*" she exclaimed, as if Mr. Rader were not at all the question. "But the house is so upset, and I don't keep any dining-room girl in the winter," she hesitated.

"I'm not a fellow who is much trouble," Carron

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urged. He looked up like a begging boy who feels that his plea is already half won.

She hesitated, but her quick eyes continued shrewdly to consider him.

His black hair was powdered gray as a wig with dust. Dust clung to his thick eyebrows, and dust and sweat of many miles was on his face, but the fact that it was an attractive face was not obscured. The eyes were frank and persuasive; the mouth was cautious; the neck sat squarely on the shoulders, firm as if riveted there. Body and head alike bore a suggestion of the Greek—not of the splendid statued heroes, but of the light lads of the Parthenon frieze, astride of horses, and inviting fate with brave, objective eyes.

That disarming youthfulness, that outward gaze which seemed so sure of triumphs, were making inroads upon the resolution of the woman with the broom. She hovered at the cross-road of decision, while a sort of unready sweetness struggled through her formal expression. "I am going to like her," Carron thought, and thinking, involuntarily smiled at her.

"Well, I suppose you can stay," she said reluctantly, as though the smile had somehow clenched the matter to her mind.

He was out of the buggy before she could have

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time to regret her decision. "You are very kind to take me in," he said gratefully, "and my mare, too. She would be worse off at night in the open than I. If you will tell me where the stable is, I will get her under cover immediately. She's too hot to stand."

The woman looked apologetic. "I hate to have you go yourself, but there is no one here now that knows much about horses."

Carron permitted himself a moment's wonder. What about Rader?

She lifted her voice to a penetrative note, calling "Ge—o—o—rge."

A half-grown boy looked out at the door. He had a singularly vacant face. A quantity of dirty clothes were in his hand, an apron was tied around his waist. His occupation had perhaps been that of cleaning windows.

Mrs. Rader went close to him, put her hand on his shoulder and spoke into his eyes as if he had been a deaf person. "George, I want you to show this gentleman over to the barn, wait there, and get him anything he wants.—If you go quite close, and take hold of him, and look at him when you talk," she explained to Carron aside, "he always understands. He knows where everything is."

Preceded by this guide, who, unlike the natural boy, seemed unembarrassed by his feminine gar-

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ment, and walked boldly with apron strings fluttering, Carron led the chestnut around the drive past the greater entrance and, swinging into the angle of the left wing, past its worn, white front, with painted decorations of wood above the windows and steps going up to a little door retired under the roof of the porch; past these and, just beyond, turned aside down a wagon track which branched and descended at the left of the house. The barn stood in a clearing close-clipped by trees with brown sift of pine-needles upon its roof. It was large, but of an appearance as dilapidated as the gate-posts, and Carron thought anxiously of the chestnut's welfare. The boy led straight through the door, the lintel of which sagged alarmingly, through a very cavern of ancient odors, cobwebs and echoes, slid another door and emerged upon quite a different place, smaller, well-kept, altogether more modern—evidently an addition built upon the greater stable. There was no vehicle in the carriage house, no carriage harness; a few bridles hung on pegs. The only saddle was a side-saddle. There were three stalls, one occupied by a mustang, with an ugly head and prettily built legs, two empty. In the first of these the boy strewed straw and shook down hay. The last, evidently habitually occupied, just now was empty.

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Carron wondered as he made ready the irritable chestnut for her night's lodging, whether that last stall belonged to Rader's horse. The thought made him anxious. "Is the horse that belongs in that stall coming back to-night?" he asked the boy who had come out of the harness room with a blanket over his arm.

The strange creature only stared.

Mindful of Mrs. Rader's advice, Carron went close to him, but some lack in the face made it repugnant. He could not bring himself to touch the fellow. He raised his voice and pointed behind him. "Is the horse that belongs there, in that stall, coming back to-night?"

The boy's gaze intensified, seemed to concentrate, and, if the face had not been so blank, Carron would have fancied a pale glare of hostility in the eyes; but the lips, showing a faint gleam of teeth behind their relaxed line, remained unmoved.

Carron took the blanket and went into the stall. He felt uncomfortable out of reason. While he settled the covering over the chestnut's pettish shoulders and fastened her, he had an uneasy consciousness of the boy's eyes, like an observing animal's, following every movement. He took off his duster, flicked off his boots, shook the worst dust from his hair, gathered up the gun cases in the back of the

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runabout and turned to go. The boy was standing motionless with his arm slightly crooked just as the blanket had been taken from it; but when Carron turned, he slipped rapidly ahead of him and disappeared in the darkness of the old stable. A flight of ghostly little echoes announced his passing through. Carron waited several moments before he could overcome his instinct to go out by another way.

"Queer business," he thought, as he walked back along the wagon track. "More deaf in his mind than in his ears, I should say. I wonder if he understood me! Ugh!" Moral obliquity he could meet with untroubled nerves, but deformity in body or brains disturbed his very flesh. He glimpsed the white, turbaned head of the proprietress peering for him from the porch, and that brought back his more important perplexity. "How in the deuce am I to get at this Rader?" he pondered. "I shall have to persuade that good soul to keep me another night." Lacking a hat, he raised his hand in salute as she caught sight of him.

"Your room is ready," she said. "I have had to put you in the old wing where we live in the winters. I hope you don't mind."

"I shall like it above all things—better, I am sure, than the new part," Carron declared, and was di-

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verted to see her glance at him as if she suspected he must be joking.

He followed her across the piazza and down a wide, dust-disturbed hall, from which gaping doors gave on wide, dust-disturbed, dismantled drawing-rooms; across a high and glaring dining-room, with turrets of chairs tottering on the glassy tables, and out into a hall, dark after the long spaces of white, pine walls and glistening floors, narrow, used and old, with windows looking direct into the trees, and an unruffled air smelling faintly of the forest. Several doors opened from here, some white, worn almost to the wood, others freshly painted, but all of the same design, rather low, narrow-paneled and with eyebrows of cut woodwork. A staircase clambered between two walls, and up this the proprietress led him, across another hall, and with the flinging open of a door, he found himself presented to a large room, with windows thinly veiled in muslin, and looking abruptly into the pines. The light which sifted through their branches came pale and greenish like light through water. The yellow reflection of a wood fire darted along the floor.

"There's a bath-room through that door, the one on the right," his conductress said, indicating with a wave of her hand; "and if you will leave your boots and things outside I'll see they are cleaned

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and brushed. It's a very dusty trip up here. I will tell you when dinner is ready." She gave him a long, doubtful look in which she somehow expressed a wish that he had not persuaded her to entertain him, then turned away, softly shutting the door.

Left alone, Carron let his gun cases slip to the floor. "Of all extraordinary places!" he thought, but then he looked around the room and smiled. It was of a piece with a little hall below. He suspected its kinship to the gaunt, white gate-posts. It was naïve, ornate, somewhat worn, yet with an amusing air of being grand. He felt a charm in it in spite of the jig-saw carvings—or possibly because of them. His eyes lingered at the mantelpiece, of most astonishing flourishes, appreciated the landscape painted on the foot of the bed, moved with quickness across the light, blank walls, and inadvertently caught sight of himself in a mirror.

He thought he could understand his landlady's hesitation now. "Takes me for a barglar rather poorly disguised," he reflected. In the excitement of his arrival he had forgotten his appearance as well as his fatigue. Now he abandoned his outer garments to the banisters of the hall, and in a few minutes rolled into cold water as a fish to its native element. The weariness of twenty-four hours' activity, the exhaustion of body, of brain and

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of a will which, all day, had exerted pressure on a will in revolt—slipped from him, absorbed by the icy stimulant. Even while he wallowed there, his fancy, refreshed, took time to speculate on what sort of mind the fellow must have had who had conceived the remarkable decoration of the bathroom ceiling. Hard-rubbed, reclothed, with an agreeable consciousness of quicker blood in his veins and a brain fully ready again not only to make light, but to make capital of his difficulties, he re-entered the bedroom.

He saw first his gun cases on the floor. He gathered them up, and carefully drew out one of the rifles. The bright firelight showed an unscratched barrel and lighted a stock that had never lain on the ground, never perhaps even felt the pressure of a shoulder. He turned it. His eye caught sight of a tiny green oval of paper pasted on the under side of the stock. He raised his eyebrows, and scratched the green paper delicately off. "I ought to have fired those things a few times on the way up," he thought. "Still it won't do any harm to let them suppose I am a green hunter." He laid both rifles on the bed, put his hands in his pockets and strolled across to a window. It faced on the clearing. At his left he could see, projecting, the façade of the newer house,

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and directly beneath him the steps leading up to the side entrance. He glanced at the other windows of the room, which looked into the trees, and was caught by the fact that one of them was a door. It was the upper half of glass that had been misleading. He opened it. The sweet breath of the pines rushed upon him. He was looking from a narrow balcony down a flight of outside stairs to the floor of the forest. Above him the pale color of sunset was in the sky.

"Very pleasant," he murmured, and stood softly whistling, surveying it. His eyes were half closed, and he appeared to be dreamily speculating on the charming twilight around him. In fact he did not see it. His thoughts were turned inward. He was speculating, with intensest concentration, upon Rader.

CHAPTER II

RADER

TO speculate on Rader's character would have been a vain thing, worthy of a philosopher. If Rader's personality was reflected in this hotel on the fringe of civilization, with its patchwork of new upon old, then Rader most probably was a broken-down speculator, clinging to the pretensions of his past. But Carron knew that people are never what they are deduced, and seldom what they are expected to be. It would be time enough to think of Rader's character once he had appeared. The important question now was, where was he?

Doubtless he was away hunting. If that were so, would he be back to dinner? or would he be away several days, and was it a question of hanging on here until he returned? That, Carron thought, would not be so difficult in itself. He felt rather confident of overcoming Mrs. Rader's doubts. But to wait, when time never waits, when everything was so pressing, when this strange latter summer, lingering in the first of September, might at any time chill, and the sky send torrents of rain! And, even

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if the heat held, what guarantee had he of the stability of his dearly fancied object? If only it had been insensate—a gold mine, anything that could be depended on to remain in one place!

He turned restlessly and shut the outer door. Standing still and awaiting events was a thing he hated. He crossed the room, opened the door into the hall, and stood idly listening. Not a sound of voices, no arrival of wheels, not even the rustle of a woman's skirt! He wandered down the stair, and found the hall below like a dark pocket. While he stood, hesitating, wondering in which direction to grope, and into what sort of place he might precipitate himself supposing he would find a door, one almost in front of him opened, the light of a candle spotted the dark, and beside it Mrs. Rader's face.

At sight of him so close before her she started. The candle flame quivered. "How you frightened me!" she panted.

"I'm sorry," said Carron mildly, "but I'm so hungry!"

"Dinner is ready. I was just coming to call you. You know," she looked at him accusingly, "I told you that I would."

He held open the door for her, and, after a funny flutter, as if she were not sure that her guest ought not to go first, she let him follow her through.

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A lamp was on the table—and three places were set. Carron's pulse of anticipation rose; but no third person came to occupy that place, no mention of such a one was made, and the meal was not kept waiting. Carron and Mrs. Rader were opposite each other. She had discarded her white head covering, and showed plentiful brown hair, streaked with gray, drawn back smoothly from her small, irregular-featured face. In spite of fine multiplying lines and weathered skin, it still kept a vague hint of the charm of her youth, though just wherein that charm had consisted was difficult to say. Carron had never seen a face so limited to one expression—an impersonal, alert, attentive, practical expression—and he had never seen such uncommunicative eyes. For the sake of enlivening them a little he began a story of some adventures of his two days before on the Sacramento boat. She listened attentively with a faint propitiatory smile; but he thought she was more struck by the fact that he talked to her than by what he said. Her struggle to do her part in the conversation was touching. Her capacity, as he had seen, was prompt enough in practical matters. No doubt she could deal successfully with the more important problems of a hotel, from people trying to leave without paying to people dropping in without baggage. But to

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keep alive a conversation with a man, and a stranger, was a burden to her. He watched her, bolt upright, wrestling with the problem of his intellectual entertainment as if they were at a dinner of state. He wondered whether her extreme formality was due to shyness on her part, or some idiosyncrasy of his that made her uneasy.

She let her end of the conversation flag and, for lack of his response, fall; and made that scarcely perceptible stir that women do before rising. He had heard it rustle in satin skirts, around far-off dinner tables, as he heard it now in the calico gown of this woman of the broom.

He leaned forward and stopped her with a question that seemed in no way designed to stop her. "Is there much hunting around here, Mrs. Rader?"

"There's lots of game, if that's what you mean," she said, "but almost no one ever comes up so far. If you're going higher up still I'm afraid you'll find it very lonely."

The idea of going hunting for company's sake tickled Carron. "Then perhaps you'll let me stay on here a few days," he suggested.

"Oh, I'm afraid—" she began.

"Perhaps Mr. Rader can take a day off, and give me more points about this part of the country than my guide can."

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"But he—"

"I mean," Carron explained, "as soon as he gets back. He's not to be gone long, is he?"

"Why, he isn't away," she exclaimed. "He's here!"

"Oh!" Carron murmured. He looked keenly at her. Involuntarily he glanced at the empty place.

"He often doesn't come in to supper," Mrs. Rader explained.

"Well, then—" he hesitated. Finding himself so suddenly all but upon Rader was embarrassing as well as exciting. "Do you think he's busy this evening?"

In her turn Mrs. Rader was surprised. "He isn't busy, exactly, but I'm afraid," she smiled faintly, "he doesn't know much more about hunting than I do."

"No doubt you both know much more than I do. Do you think perhaps he could spare me a few minutes?"

"Oh, yes." She looked at him more curiously than she had since his first arrival. He thought she was about to offer another objection, but she only said, "Would you like to see him now?"

"If it is convenient." He tried to make the answer sound casual enough, but he was beginning to have the most uneasy expectations of Rader.

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She opened the door, and took up one of the lighted candles. "Then you will step this way. He's in the study."

Again Carron recognized the unexpected—that Rader was to be found in a study instead of in an office. It seemed, not only that hotels had lives out of season, but that their owners had lives outside of hotel-keeping. Mrs. Rader's candle led down a long, black passage. The flame threw no smaller light on the darkness than her chance phrases and expressions had thrown on the possibilities of her husband's personality. But there had been glimpses out of the obscurity in passing—such gleams as the candle caught from window-panes, or pine branches beyond them—chance illuminations of words upon individualities, that put edge to Carron's anxiety.

The light, which had led him like a will-o'-the-wisp, stopped now at a door, closing the end of the passage. This, Mrs. Rader knocked upon, and, after a moment, opened. "Some one to see you," she said to one inside, and Carron stepped over the worn threshold, down a worn step into a little round room; and found himself facing Rader, who had risen from his chair, and, with his glasses gleaming above the high arch of his brow, with his shadow towering on the wall behind him, was looking out at Carron from twilight walls of books.

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He seemed bewildered with this sudden introduction into his solitude of a strange presence. His large blue eyes blinked slowly, like eyes just awakening; and though his long face presently collected a sort of courteous attention, his gaze still seemed to focus on some point remote from the present moment and place. If there was any one in the world less likely than the woman to have the certain peculiar information Carron wanted, he thought it was this individual, this long figure of a scholar, roused from meditation. All Carron's unsubstantial hopes were tottering. The man on the road appeared the merest liar, the whole thing the wildest of chases. Yet, in spite of that, he felt he was going to see it through. There was nothing that had ever happened to him that he had failed to see through. The quality in him that never released what it had once taken hold of until all was out of it, that took the last chance and found it more alluring than the first, urged him forward.

"My name is Francis Carron," he said. "There is my card. Mr. Rader, I believe?"

Rader looked a little startled with the rapidity with which the sentences were shot at him. "You came to see about the Bronson folio?" he asked doubtfully.

Carron had it in his heart to laugh when he

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thought of what a business he had brought to the dry leaves of a library. The idea of introducing himself as a buyer of old editions danced a moment in his brain; but he had spent his life being himself with an intensity which defied the hope of dissimulation now. "I came to see you on business, Mr. Rader," he explained, "but not about a folio—in fact, not about books at all."

The scholar glanced wistfully toward the door which the woman had closed after her. "Then, perhaps you had better see Mrs. Rader," he began. "I—"

But Carron's wits were hard on Rader's second conclusion. "No, it isn't about the hotel either. I am afraid it is you yourself I want to see; but, if I disturb you now—"

The scholar made a deprecatory gesture. "I beg your pardon. Sit down. I am absent-minded, only that—Mr.—" he fumbled helplessly in his memory.

"Carron," the other prompted.

"Carron," Rader repeated, and moved his glasses down his forehead, clamping them upon the high bridge of his nose, and through these, considered the card. The owner of it watched him keenly, but undoubtedly that assemblage of letters on white paper held no idea for Rader beyond the fact that it was a name. With a faint sigh, he let himself stiffly down

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into his chair again, withdrew his fingers from the leaves of a book, and by that motion seemed to relinquish all hope of waving his visitor aside. The lamp on the desk between them lighted the two men to each other, the scholar leaning a little forward, looking puzzled, but scarcely curious.

Carron knew he was in for it now, on the instant. All his plans for approaching his question gradually, through the common ground of similar interests, hunting and the activities of mountaineers, vanished. It was across a gulf of widely differing thought that he must pitch his question at the scholar, the more flatly the better to hold the attention that seemed each moment to be at the point of deserting him.

"It's not quite a piece of business I want to talk to you about," he said. "It is a favor I want to ask of you. There has been a rumor through the Sacramento Valley, and through the mining towns below here of a stallion at large among these mountains."

Rader's high eyebrows flickered, and his head moved a little forward on his long neck. It was only an intensifying of his look of polite attentiveness. "A horse you have lost?"

It forced a reluctant smile out of Carron. "No, Mr. Rader, not a horse that any one has lost; a horse that has never been found; a horse that I very much

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wish to find for myself; not a mustang, not a range pony, but a blooded stallion, fifteen hands, black and perfect; not a horse that's been left too long on the range and become wild, but the original wild horse that no one has ever ridden, or ever caught, or rarely, if ever, seen."

He got out the last words with an effort, fully conscious, now that they were spoken and ringing in the air, of how improbable, fantastic and laughable they sounded. He braced himself to meet Rader's ridicule, or, at the best, his amusement. But the scholar, with his long body bent a little farther forward over the table, was only gazing at him with a face of increasing perplexity, with a slow-dawning, troubled look of being aware of something he was going to recognize if only he had a little more time.

Carron watched him, and pushed one sentence further.

"No one seemed to be sure how much truth there was in the story, or whether there was any at all, but they seemed to think, if any one could tell me, you could."

The effect of this was more than he had bargained for. Rader let his relaxed hands fall on the table, and stared in amazement. "I can—they think!" he murmured, seeming to catch at these words as the

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chief points of his confoundment. "Who told you that? Who do you mean by they?"

"Then you do know about it?" Carron said quietly.

The scholar seemed not to have heard.

"People in different parts of the valley have directed you to me, on this errand?" he persisted.

"Why, that's a strange thing!"

Looking into his candid and bewildered eyes, Carron knew he was going to be frank with Rader at the expense of the man on the road. "For a fact, Mr. Rader," he confessed, "it was one person who directed me here, only one; and he didn't want to. I had to work to get it out of him."

Rader's expression came around slowly from flat incredulity to a fresh query. "Well, why shouldn't he direct you?"

"That was what I thought," said Carron, as puzzled now by Rader as Rader was by the man on the road, "but I supposed it was because you had asked him not to."

"I?" Rader repeated. He seemed to have the greatest difficulty in connecting himself with the matter at all. "Why the deuce should I ask him not to?"

Carron stared. "If you haven't, some one has."

The scholar silently confronted this cryptic re-

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sponse, and presently it appeared that his perplexity had lessened, had been transformed into a slow, ruminating consideration. "What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Because he had it badly on his conscience that he ought not to have told it."

Rader gave a slight upward motion of his head, and a lift of his eyebrows as if at a word more he might accept that explanation. "Where did you meet this fellow?"

"I was on my way to the city from Nevada with some horses," Carron said, "when I ran across him in Truckee last night. I got in early in the evening and found the train wouldn't leave until after midnight. This chap was hanging around the livery when I put my horses up."

"What did he look like?" Rader hastily interrupted.

Carron was aware that he had the scholar interested at last, and the power to speak rose in him to meet the flattery. "Oh, middle height, small jointed, a little knock-kneed, if I remember; black hair, Napoleonic profile minus the strength—young ranchman in his Sunday clothes." Rader ticked off the characteristics on his fingers while he listened. "He had some whisky in him," Carron continued, "and was rather free about disparag-

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ing my stock. He handled them all over, not very cleverly, nearly got himself kicked, and then trailed me up to the hotel to tell me he could throw a stone across the road and kill a horse anywhere in the Sacramento Valley that could beat mine at every point. He was rather glib with his tongue, and I had four hours to wait, so I invited him to come in and give me his ideas on horseflesh. There's a little back room in the top story, looking up a stone dump that they call a mountain. I gave him one pony of rye to start him. We sat there for six hours.

"He began by giving his experiences in horse-breaking, though from a sort of callous on his hands, and the way he handled his feet I thought he had been more accustomed to horses in front of a plow than under saddle. Then he got off on famous horses he had seen, most of which had died before he was born; and, finally, of course, he began to wind himself up on a horse he owned that could beat everything in the state of California. Just there it struck me he'd graduated from the lying stage. Something in the way he described that horse—those particulars that a man can't invent—made me think it wasn't a piece of imagination. He built up a stock farm around it in a few minutes, but it was easy to see that the real

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thing in it was the horse. So I pinned him down, and kept him pinned—and not too much rye—until we'd got rid of the stock farm, canceled the fact that the horse was his, and got down to what looked like bedrock—which is just the story I have told you, that the creature was a wild horse running free in these mountains. The only difference he made then was that he swore on his sacred honor that he was the only man in the state of California who had ever seen it."

Rader took his long chin in his hand and meditated for a moment. "Xenophon," he said, "states that wild horses inhabit countries of plains, travel in bands, and that the stallions are not found separately from the mares."

"Quite right he is," Carron assented, as if Xenophon were easily his contemporary; "a lone stallion is as rare as a singing bird at sea; but still there are exceptions. Once in a while a dry summer brings it about. A horse drifts into the mountains in search of water. And then, there was another thing that made me think perhaps there was something in the fellow's story. If you want to know, it's the thing that brought me here. When he described that horse to me I thought he described a horse that I had seen once myself."

"Ah!" but the word did not express Rader's en-

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lightenment—only a fresh perplexity. “But, I thought you said—”

“One moment. I’m coming to that presently. I only wanted you to see that I wasn’t so drunk or so visionary as that poor devil who brought me along, though I own that I was pretty much excited. He wanted a hundred dollars for taking me up country to the place where the creature was supposed to be. I told him I’d give him twenty dollars for that, and a hundred if I found the horse. The end of the business was that I didn’t take the midnight for the city. Instead, I put him, and myself, on the overland at one o’clock, and one of my animals into the box-car, because she’d carry us up country faster than these mountain rats; changed at Reno for Beckwith, and, at seven-thirty this morning, I started from Beckwith with him still pretty well under the influence.

“It didn’t occur to me that he would turn tail at the last moment. People, once they are with me in a thing, usually stick.” He said this without consciousness, merely as a fact which he had seen demonstrated, and the scholar accepted it with the naïveté equal to his own. “At first I thought it was the drink dying out of him, but there was something more in his behavior than that. It was queer! The further we went, the more we got up into the

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mountains, the sulkier he grew, until finally he denied up and down everything he had told me, ate his words like a sword swallower, and when we got away up the cañon, he insisted on getting out of the buggy and leaving me. Fortunately I hadn't paid him his money yet, and it was on that account I got the two words I did get out of him. 'Try Rader's,' he said and as soon as he had said it you should have seen his face! Scared—scared to death! He looked as if he wanted to kill me."

Rader slowly rubbed one dry hand over the other. He looked troubled, even vaguely distressed. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I thought certainly he would never have spoken of it."

Carron wrinkled his forehead. "I'm sorry, too, Mr. Rader, if he has abused your confidence. But you see the horse is public property. It never occurred to me that there could be any sworn oaths of secrecy about it."

"Oh, he hasn't abused *my* confidence," Rader said.

"I see!" Carron saw at once a great deal that had been obscure to him. The thing seemed an endless chain. "I suppose you know whose confidence he is abusing, then?"

Rader leaned back in his chair, his head still bent forward, looking up inquiringly from under his

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brows. "Before I go any further, do you mind if I ask you a question or two?"

"As many as you like. Go ahead."

"I don't know much about horses, very little more about men; I don't know that either have ever mattered much to me, but I wish that I could understand, I wonder if you could make me, why you have come so far, and taken as much trouble to find a single horse as most men take to find a gold mine?"

This time it was Carron who was surprised. "I've gone almost as far, and given almost as much trouble for a good many horses. Why, good Lord, a man has to if he wants to get them!"

"But why want to? There are enough horses in the world!"

"Well—suppose it is the finest horse in the world?"

Rader's high eyebrows went higher in incredulity. "What, with Arabia, and our own thoroughbred stock?"

"Of course, I mean the finest wild horse. That makes all the difference!"

"H'm—yes," Rader agreed. "I can see, there is something in that; but you said you had taken as much trouble in getting other horses!"

Carron knitted his forehead. "I don't know how to explain it—I've always done it. I suppose any-



"Oh, he hasn't abused *my* confidence," Rader said

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thing you're doing all the time gets hold of you—that is, if you like it well enough. You get to think of it as the center of the world.”

The scholar's eyes brightened. “Yes, yes! That's true—the very thing.” He looked at the books behind him, reached out and touched a volume as though he would have liked to speak of it; then his eyes returned with a bright and almost boy-like interest to his companion. “Do I understand you to mean you are by profession a catcher and breaker of horses?”

“Ever since I was thirteen, though I haven't called it a profession until the last five years. But I know more about it, and care more about it, and can do it better than anything else in the world. Over in Nevada they know my name pretty well. I hold a hundred square miles that are mine for five years, and I save this union of forsaken states about twenty thousand dollars annually in the creatures that aren't killed getting them under saddle.”

“You mean you are sort of an official?” The spark of Rader's interest dimmed.

“Lord, no! I only mean I do save horseflesh, and more or less the country profits. So do I, a little, but not much. It's more the fun of the thing. You've no idea, from what you see of bridle-wise horses, what the wild ones are like. You know, a

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broken horse is like a woman—nervous, brain in a tea-cup, shying at a shadow. But these fellows, the herd leaders, are tough as whip-cord, smarter than a wolf and quicker than a snake. They'll get away from you through a crack in a fence.

"Last spring I got on the trail of a stallion that, I'll take my oath, was a good deal stronger, cleverer and faster than any other horse in the world. The Indians said he was sired by the North Wind. A couple of them claimed to have seen him, and their description made me very curious. I chased him over southern Nevada, saw the tail of the herd once or twice, but never the leader. But we kept them edging over westward until about the last week of last month, a hundred miles short of the state line, I thought I had him. I even got the herd into the runway and stampeded for the corral; but there must have been a weak place in the fence—I don't know now how it happened! I should have said it was impossible; but, just before the first of the corral canvas, the leader swerved and went through the stockade as if it had been paper. His mares were going too fast to stop. We took the whole of them, and he got off alone." Carron moistened his lips. "I saw him. He went close by me: black, not a blemish, star on his forehead, a white fleck on his breast, left foot white and mane like a flag. To

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watch him take the rise of the rolling ground, and clip into the hollow, and rise again was like watching a flying bird. I saw him, and I named him on the spot, 'Son of the Wind,' because he is the greatest, fastest, loneliest thing that travels over earth—and he's mine!"

Leaning back, his fingers propping his chin, Rader had followed the recital with the same bright, intense gaze with which he might have followed an epic. Now, when the pause came, he smiled and brought down his hand lightly on the arm of his chair. "Diomedes!" he said. His eyes rested on the young man's throat left bare by a soft collar, the lithe line of his back, his hands thrust forward on the table, the sleeves pushed up above the wrists, showing the breadth and sharp lift of the muscle, as if these things were what the story had explained to him.

It was extraordinary to Carron that the real significance of his tale had gone so completely over Rader's head—or perhaps under his feet. "Don't you see," he explained, "I think that horse and this may be the same."

The scholar looked suddenly brought down to earth, and, as always when there, rather at a loss.

"Which one?" he asked blindly.

"The one I lost in Nevada is the one here in these

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mountains. I lost him only a couple of hundred miles from here. My horse was separated from his herd, so is this one. Then, word for word, the description tallies. At least, I hope"—he looked anxiously at Rader—"that you are going to tell me it does."

"I? But," Rader objected, "I have never seen such a thing!" The idea of it seemed almost to frighten him.

Carron looked at him hard. It was not possible to construe those deep-set, clear, blue eyes as anything but candid. "But you know some one who has?"

Rader was silent.

"One thing," Carron persisted. "You do know for a fact that there is such a creature?"

The scholar looked down. "Do we, any of us, know for a fact a thing we have never seen?"

The blood flew to Carron's face. He felt held back, baffled, played with! For Rader's manner, with all its frank simplicity, was not the manner of ignorance. "I think you do know quite well," Carron said, "but for some reason you prefer not to say."

"For a good reason," Rader answered. He leaned his head back against his chair, and plunged his hands in his capacious pockets. His long, gray

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face, and the whole figure of the man, shrunken by reading, seemed slowly expanding, thawing themselves at some genial glow. "In the first place, it is not my business. In the second place, I have no interest in it, except, I confess, what you've given me." Again his eye went over Carron's physical magnificence. "I own I wouldn't mind to see you astride of the finest horse in America, or—pardon me—did you say the world? Unfortunately I can't."

The half interrogatory, half propitiatory look with which he punctuated his negatives took away all the sting. But the negative, nevertheless, was there.

"Couldn't you," Carron urged, "tell me the name of this person who seems to hold a property right on a wild animal?"

"As the fellow on the road told you?" Rader inquired.

Carron, with a reluctant smile, had to admit the scholar's acuteness.

"But don't you think," he argued, "that you ought to give your friend the chance of refusing my offer himself, or accepting it if he wants to?"

Rader shook, and his eyes flashed a thousand twinkles. "That is a pretty keen argument, my boy, but it seems to me you're taking a deal for granted!"

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He undoubled his length from his old chair. "Suppose we drop my hypothetical friend, and talk about yourself." He stood, with his long legs straddled, looking down upon Carron, who sat at sharp struggle with his temper, exasperation and disappointment descending on him at once. "Suppose you stay over a few days, get a rest and look around. Perhaps you can get a little shooting," Rader suggested.

Carron grinned in spite of himself to hear his own fabrication come back upon him like a boomerang. "Thanks," he said dryly, "I only bargained with Mrs. Rader to stop overnight."

"Well, bargain with me then."

"I have," said Carron. "No use!"

They looked at each other appreciatively. Rader reached a hand and patted Carron's shoulder. "Stay over a few days—stay over!" he said almost gaily. "It may interest you to look around the place! No knowing what may turn up!"

Carron raised his eyes quickly. Rader's manner was significant. His face did not hold a double meaning; 'twas rather as if the inspiration behind had been unconscious.

"If I do," Carron said, "will you go hunting with me?"

Rader looked down at himself. "I haven't been

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hunting since I left college. But we'll find some one to go with you, certainly we'll find some one."

It may have been a banality, but to Carron's conscious ears it rang like a promise. "Thank you," he said. "I shall be delighted." He rose. "It's been mighty good of you to listen to me. I've taken a lot of your time."

"Have you?" said Rader. "I never know what time it is."

Carron looked at his watch. "Just ten after eleven. See here, if I'm going to stay over for a week I'll have to send a wire. Is there any way of getting one out to-morrow?"

Rader thought. "There's the stage, gets down to Beckwith about noon, passes here at six-thirty. If you'll write out your message to-night, I'll have some one meet them with it in the morning."

"Some one that you can depend on?"

"Oh, no doubt!" Rader said.

The pen was already in Carron's hand. He made a clear space among the papers on the table and wrote. The words presented to the casual eye would have been unintelligible, but the inner meaning of the code was clear, and to the point enough:

"Ship stakes, canvas and small stuff to-day for Beckwith. No delay.
F. C."

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As he signed these initials a gentle knock came on the door and a low voice spoke— "Alex, here's your candle. I suppose you will sit up. I'm going to bed."

The scholar glanced at Carron. "I'd better tell her," he murmured. He opened the door. "Hermione!" he called. The flowery sound—name of an ideal woman in a tale—struck quaintly on Carron's ears.

Mrs. Rader was already half-way down the passage. She paused, looking back, lamp in hand, while Rader walked toward her. From the threshold of the study Carron could see them conferring there in the flickering light and shadow. There was something charming, winning in the scholar, in the very slouch of his figure, with its loose-hanging clothes; something pathetic and appealing in the woman's face, tired now at the end of her day's work, and in her brown dubious-glancing eyes. They had been looking up toward her husband; but suddenly she turned them toward Carron with a furtive, half-frightened look—not one she had meant him to see; an involuntary look that had got away from her.

It disturbed him, that any woman should regard him in that way. He had a hasty impulse to reassure her that there was nothing in his presence that need alarm her. The look was withdrawn almost before he could take it in, but the impression of it

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remained with him. "She doesn't want me to stay, does she?" he inquired after the woman had retreated, and the study door was shut. "Bless my soul," the scholar had declared, "why not? Of course, she's delighted!"

Carron accepted the courteous rebuke, but kept his first opinion on the subject. He liked Mrs. Rader; he liked being liked for its own sake, and that air she had of suspecting him touched his vanity.

She, whom he had thought no problem at all in the beginning, was evidently not confiding. It was the man, the shy, self-absorbed scholar, who had so readily given his allegiance.

Unconscious partisan Rader was! He warmed himself at Carron's vitality as at a fire. Stretching out his long legs beneath the table, lounging on his background of books, "How about some sherry?" he proposed. "I expect to be up for a couple of hours more."

Carron had not realized how strongly his story, or himself, or both together, had touched the scholar's fancy until, after the interruption at an advanced hour, he showed an inclination to resume their companionship. He had pushed aside his solitary self-evolved thoughts for the talk of the horse-breaker just as he had put aside his Greek book to make room for the glasses. Still from a

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distance, still with detachment, he questioned his companion. He asked first what university, as if for a sign of freemasonry. Carron confessed to not graduating from Harvard. The idea of not graduating, of voluntarily leaving such institution, was difficult for Rader to understand. What college had been his own, and what honors there, he did not volunteer—one of the obscure, austere New England institutions no doubt—but it made no difference about the college. The universal stamp was on him of the man of the world of books. Not scientist, not psychist, not a student of any practical knowledge, but reader of histories in dead languages, dreamer over poetry in archaic forms, pursuer of the derivations of words through volumes; to whom Herodotus was as recent as Guizot, and both contemporary with himself; to whom the *Bucolics* were more real than the boys driving cattle down the cañon valley.

In such company as this, book company, he sat, lived; and, from such a world he looked distantly at the young man as at a symbol of the other outside active world. It was of this other world only that he inquired; and Carron put aside the questions that were foremost in his own mind, and surrendered himself to satisfying the awakened curiosity.

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His adventures, drifting in the north and south of the large west, his present profession—the excitements and the dangers of it—the look of the country there as if hell had blasted it, and the rough life in it, he told them all. The rougher the more it seemed to strike Rader's imagination. He had a curious faculty of seeing resemblances in real things, men, horses and mountains, to frescoes, bas-reliefs and palaces; he had, too, a disconcerting way of breaking into a narrative with: "Tell me, what is it in a man that makes him do a thing like that?"

The horse-breaker had never interrogated himself in such fashion, though he had seen, far and wide, the curious, unaccountable things that men will do. He could not answer Rader, though the scholar made a dozen suppositions for himself upon each point, some glancing at what might have been the truth, some wide the possibility. He could only tell still more things to be wondered at, and he perceived the more he told, the more he gave of himself, the more response he had from his companion. He was beginning to understand that he was in Rader's hands like a new book. His interest for the scholar was not on what common ground they could meet, but into what fresh fields Carron could lead him. He had led him a long way to-night.

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It was late, one o'clock, when they parted. Carron's brain boiled with the excitements of thirty-six hours. Its fatigues rested on him not a feather. He found his room dark and warm. The fire had fallen to a red spark. Soft branches moved against the window screens. He set his candle down on the table, and wondered how much there was in Rader's promising. "Wonderful old boy!" he thought. "A man might believe he was deep in the business, but I've half a notion he is only what he claims, an honorary member of the secret, with a practical sense of honor—only practical thing about him!" It was practical indeed, for it hadn't prevented Rader's inviting him to stay, to stay longer and see what would turn up. It hadn't even prevented Rader's throwing in his way a hunting companion, a person nameless, but somehow it had entered Carron's head that it was a person of importance in his affairs. The thing had only been suggested. It had all been done in a tone unaware of its own significance, and it was that which had made the significance so great.

Faint sounds outside caught his ear, neither the shrill crickets nor the broad, soft sound of the awakening wind, but more regular, muffled and mechanical. He puffed out his light and went, cautious-footed, to the window. It was the window

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looking from the front of the wing, commanding the loop of the drive and the steps. Some one was standing just within the hood of the porch, for from the entrance streamed a narrow shaft of light, shining with the peculiar floating, wavering gleam which is only given by a light held in the hands. From the beat of hoofs and the scarcely perceptible sound of wheels it was a single rig that was approaching. The light shone presently on the horse's head, flashed in his eyes, slipped along his flank as he swung around, and finally stopped as the buggy stopped, resting upon the back part of the wagon body, leaving the hollow between the dashboard and the hood in black shadow.

"You are earlier than I used to be, Bert," Rader's voice spoke from the veranda. Beside his clear, singing tone the replying voice was slovenly in enunciation, and muffled, but Carron heard enough to get its timber and quality, and his heart quickened as the idea shot through his mind. Was this the person, that mysterious third person who had tied Rader's tongue and put the man on the road so much in awe? A young man! Not Rader's contemporary, but his own. Carron saw the difficulty doubled. It would make the stallion harder to come at than buried treasure. He pressed his face to the glass and peered down. A vague form, dark on

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darkness, was mounting up the steps, slowly, as if encumbered with a cloak. Rader had moved forward. Carron could see his bent head and his extended hand. A hand was reached out of the shadow, and, for a moment, in the narrow beam of light appeared an arm, long, bare almost to the shoulder, and so shapely, so suggestive of dimples, and, against the black shadows around it, so white that for an instant thought deserted him. An arm, without a clear seen body, suddenly thrust upon him from darkness—a woman's arm where he had expected a man's face! "What in the world!" Carron muttered softly, holding his breath with doubt of what was to follow. "What the devil!" he ended. For Rader suddenly raised the lamp, the arm disappeared in a fold of darkness, the whole form, still unseen, passed and disappeared under the piazza roof, and Carron's eyes, following down the beam of light, discovered at the end of it the figure of a man standing upon the lowest step looking up at Rader, the unexpected and rather amazing sight of "the man on the road."

CHAPTER III

BLANCHE

HE WAS awakened in the morning by the sound of young things scuttering. A race was forward in the hall—first the panting and patter-patter and scratch of some small animal in full career; a shower of light quick footsteps following, the sound of a body in soft collision with his door, and then, the voice.

“No, no, Beetles, give it to me—give it to me this instant!” A young school-mistress controlling her youngest scholar could not have been more severe. “There’s no use hiding under my petticoat; hold your head up. Now—” dropping to an encouraging tone—“open your mouth, and give it to Missus;” falling to a dulcet note that would have wiled an image—“no, little dog mustn’t eat it. It’s hard and cold and bad for his inside;” suddenly rising to the pitch of Napoleon commanding his army—“Do you hear! *Beetles!*”

Evidently there was a tussle. He guessed the child was on her knees. The door vibrated slightly with

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the struggling bodies. Carron heard squeaks and whimpers of a puppy in high excitement, and then a whimper of quite a different origin.

"Ugh! you little beast! You would, would you!" Between set teeth, "Just the same, I'm going to—there!" The last word was pitched to virtue triumphant; but the puppy's indignant yelp was higher yet, the resentment of frustrated will.

The jar of a door opening farther down the hall was audible, and a second voice, raised to cover the distance, suppressed with the fear of being overheard and thus giving a double carrying quality, reached him as distinctly as if it had been spoken through the keyhole. "Blanche, what in the world are you doing there?"

The reply came clear and cheerful. "Taking something away from Beetles. I was afraid he would eat it."

"Well, get up this moment, and come away." Carron felt himself pierced by the stage whisper. "Don't you know that *man* is in that room!"

There was a rustle and a hasty scrambling up, as if the door had suddenly become contaminated. At the same time a hurrying step approached down the hall. The two petticoated sounds merged almost in front of his door, and he found himself a not unwilling listener to the duet that followed.

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"I thought he was in the regular spare room. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I haven't had a chance to. I didn't know you were back. There, I hope you haven't waked him up!"

"I hope I have. What is he like?"

Mrs. Rader's reply was inaudible.

"Oh, mother, I don't believe it! Is he good looking?"

"Sh-h-h!"

Carron sat up and smiled. It was like being awakened by a bird singing—it was better, for a bird would have cared not a feather about a man's looks. The bright mettlesome voice touched pleasantly on his nerves. "The precocious thing," he thought. "How old is she?"

Tussling with the dog on the floor he had put her age at thirteen, but her last sentences made him clap on three years more. "I wonder why I didn't see her last night at supper," he thought, as the voices and footsteps moved away along the hall. "I wonder—" he mused longer, and seemed less pleased with his next reflection. "I wonder how many of them there are around the place."

This thought had been summoned by the memory of last night, and the apparition of an arm thrust upon him out of darkness. That had not been the

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arm of a child, youthful though it was. It had been a thing of long curves and of a well covered turn of elbow; an arm that had found its power, concealing it cunningly in dimples; no doubt, Carron thought, an arm to strangle reason. It had risen as magically before him as ever the arm of the Lady of the Lake had risen to the king in the legend. The same feeling of irritation stirred in him that had crept in his veins the night before when it had appeared before him as the thing he had not expected, and certainly the last thing he had wanted. He was not in the least averse to the idea of a child about the place. Children, even half-grown girls, are pleasant companions and content with little attention; but a young woman might be very much in the way. Women could always be depended on to turn up at the wrong moment when a man was interested in something else, had to get through in a hurry, and wanted a clear gangway.

A clear gangway in this business was what he had not, thus far, been able to find. Not an opening but had ended in a cul-de-sac; not a person he wanted but, just as he thought his finger was upon them, turned out to be some other person. He hardly thought he could blame Rader for this. In the disappointment of last night his own over-eager imagination had led him astray; and certainly he

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couldn't blame the girl—she of the arm—but he must make sure she did not happen again as a substitute for something else that he wanted. Yet in spite of false appearances, in spite of a too-lively fancy, he saw he was a long stride nearer what he was after than he had been twenty-four hours ago. If only he could keep a cool head, and keep the ground he had gained with the scholar last night he thought that Rader's hypothetical friend would presently be his own. Of course there was the chance always that the man on the road might play turncoat, and put the scholar's friend on his guard. To find this fellow, this first informer, apparently such a familiar here among the Raders, was disconcerting. He was called by his first name. It might be that he was engaged to the young woman whom he had brought back last night. Carron discarded his last idea promptly, since as much as he had seen of her was far too fine to belong to such a clod.

He decided to abandon vain suppositions about people who were of small importance to him, and hurried his dressing. The thought of how the mare had spent the night after her hard yesterday's trip was an anxiety in his mind, and presently sent him swinging, two steps at a time, down the outside stair and toward the barn.

Voices of birds were in the air, and a pale em-

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broidery of light and shadow was drawn across the ground. The chestnut greeted him coquettishly. Carron looked at her stall and manger, glanced over her own admirable appearance, whistled with surprise, told her she was a handsome girl with four good feet and asked her who had been looking out for her so early in the morning. "It couldn't have been that child," he thought. Still, with the help of a bucket upside down, a well-grown girl, of say fifteen, might manage the grooming, though hardly the stalls. "If she did," he reflected, "she knows how. She's earned some candy." He rather thought he was going to like the younger Miss Rader. As for the elder, who went to country dances, and was squired by the man on the road, probably she would share her mother's opinion, and hold a doubtful distance. Nevertheless, as he approached the house again he looked along the piazza to see if anywhere there was the flutter of a gown; and he opened the dining-room door with a slight disturbance of the nerves.

It was a small, rather long and narrow room, with worn walls and a terrible fireplace of cast iron, but it was filled with the same pleasant, greenish, watery sunlight that had lighted his room upstairs, a tone which seemed common to the whole house. The only people at table were Mrs. Rader,

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and the scholar, but, again, there was a place set which was as yet unoccupied. Evidently in this castle of surprises the expected presence was always lacking. Rader had an open book beside him and read more than he ate. When he turned his head for a sip or for a bite, he kept his fingers between the leaves. He did not seem to be aware of the young man's entrance. It was Mrs. Rader's hand that touched him to a consciousness of it. Then he raised his eyes, smiled dimly, as with a notion of having seen Carron somewhere at some time, perhaps some years ago, and promptly returned to the pages of his book.

But Mrs. Rader accompanied her good morning with a look sufficiently aware of him, and sufficiently propitiatory for two. She had gone to call him to breakfast, she said, but as he had not answered she had supposed him still asleep. There was a faint embarrassment in her manner as she added, "I hope you rested well, that nothing disturbed you this morning?"

Carron guessed what was disturbing the good lady's sense of the decorous—that informal little scene outside his door a half hour earlier—and hastened to reassure her. "Never slept better in my life. I would have been asleep yet if it hadn't been for a brutal bluejay in a tree outside my window."

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Mrs. Rader looked relieved. "It must have been a hawk," she observed. "Bluejays don't come up this far."

A door somewhere outside shut vigorously. Rader did not change his attitude, but it was evident he had suspended reading. "There she is," he said.

"I wonder if she caught it," Mrs. Rader threw out. But to the scholar the interesting point evidently was not what the one approaching had caught, but that she would presently appear.

Carron wondered would it be "Blanche" or would it be "The Lady of the Lake?" Apparently it was a third person, neither child nor enchantress.

A longish oval face she had, long thick throat and sloping shoulders. She gave an impression of length of line without being tall, of brownness without being brown, of being but a slim reed and yet being fully a woman, of smiling and not smiling. A khaki skirt swung from her slender hips. Low shoes—spurs stuck on the heels—gave glimpses of slender ankles. Hat she had not; and her brown hair, bloused out in small wavy locks around the ears, was put up recklessly with indications of the ends of curls. A mongrel terrier with bright eyes slouched at her heels. In the first look she gave Carron an elf seemed to peep out of her eyes. Amusement, curiosity, some small elation too in-

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definite to name, was darted at him and withdrawn. She did not offer her hand, but bent her head quite in the manner of the city girl to acknowledge her mother's introduction. This consisted only of two words: "My daughter," and left Carron as uninformed as before.

"Father, I got the stage," she said, sitting down in the place beside Carron.

The scholar, who had continued his book without having looked at his daughter, now paused again, his eyes still glued to the page. "U-m-m?" he said.

"I was early for it," she went on. "I rode down as far as 'the notch' before I met it."

Carron looked at her with anxiety. "Miss Rader, I hope it wasn't my letter that you have been taking trouble about?"

She stretched a long throat with a quick inquiring turn of the head at him. "Yes—why not?"

"Of course I would have taken it myself. From what Mr. Rader said, I supposed he had a boy he could send."

"Oh, George! But with errands you can't be sure of him. It was nothing of a ride. I liked it."

"I'm very much in your debt," Carron gratefully declared himself. "It was an important letter. I promise to run all your errands for you as long as I am here."

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She smiled, her lips not unclosing, only deepening their curve. Evidently this sort of speech she understood in the spirit in which it was offered, a courtesy and not a compliment. "I hope the rain will hold off while you are here," she said. "The sport is better before it. There's more game in the mountains."

Carron thought that as far as he was concerned there would be indeed. "Do you hunt?" he inquired.

A faint line gathered between her brows. "Oh, no, I don't, and I don't really know much about what weathers are good for it; only all the men say it's better before wet weather. This morning Beetles started six covey of quail in a mile." She broke a crust of toast and held it up before the anxious eyes of the terrier. "Beetles, little dog, sit up! Sit up for Missus! Beg nicely!"

The sudden change of voice from courtesy to coaxing made Carron open his eyes. Was this she who had awakened him—she of the flying heels? Was this the one who had nestled against his door, who had demanded to know whether he was good-looking? Since she had entered the room she had not given his looks a conscious glance, and yet there was no mistaking the intonation of the voice. "Good Lord!" he thought, with a sort of awe, "are women such children when they are alone?" Nothing child-

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ish about her now—if a man could believe his sight. Her large blue eyes and the curl of her mouth were enough like a child's, but it is not in such things that a woman's maturity speaks, Carron knew, but in the proud carriage of shoulders, the level turn of head, the steady way of meeting a man's eye, and their way of meeting what he says, not as if he were an antagonist, but as if he were a human being.

Thus Blanche Rader began setting herself very prettily to find out what sort of talk he preferred; and he allowed himself the luxury of being drawn out, and being "difficult" merely for the pleasure of watching her graceful faculty at work. She had undertaken the task not impersonally—he doubted that she was capable of being quite impersonal with any one—yet rather with the air of its being the thing expected of her, the thing she always did, pleasant enough in this case, in any case her part of the business.

But Mrs. Rader, who should have found herself relieved by her daughter's aptitude, showed restlessness. Her hands moved without intention among the coffee cups. Once or twice her lips parted. She made false starts to get into the conversation. Finally, a pause giving opportunity, she leaned forward and got her daughter's eye.

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"Did you have a good time last night?" she asked. She almost faltered it.

"Yes, very good indeed. There were some new people there. I danced with them mostly."

"I thought you would dance mostly with Bert," said her mother.

The girl looked as if she suspected intention in this remark, and resented it. "He didn't dance at all. He wasn't there a good part of the time. He only came back to drive me home."

Her right arm rested on the table. The hand was tanned to a soft brown, very smooth and fine in texture, with five dimples, where most women show knuckles, and round finger-tips. Carron could see the wrist white and punctuated with a dimple. The rest was hidden in a starched sleeve. Still, he knew it must be the arm enchanted.

The owner of it, unaware of what had been his last night's vision, ate for a few moments before offering her next remark. "I think Bert was feeling ill. He wasn't like himself." She fixed a challenging gaze on her mother's face. "Sometimes I am afraid that Bert isn't quite steady."

Mrs. Rader's lips opened for reply, but she checked herself, no doubt because of the stranger. A current of hostility was in the air. The scholar raised his eyes. His look had no connection with

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what had been said. No voice outside had penetrated to that seclusion where his mind dreamed. He had simply come to the end of a phrase of thought, and now was preparing to make a transition to another. He gave his chair a gentle scrape backward and closed his book. What arrested him was the sharpness of Carron's involuntary movement forward. Rader mildly surveyed the young man's aspect of protest against thus being cavalierly deserted without apology and without a word. Perception struggled around to the fact that something was expected of him, something that he had promised. He looked at his daughter. His eyes rested upon her with something as human as affection. "Are you going to do anything in particular this morning, Blanche?" he asked.

"I'm going to help mother with the up-stairs cleaning."

"Oh!" He seemed to suffer a drop of inspiration.

She looked inquiringly. "What is it?"

"Mr. Carron," Rader explained slowly, "would like to see the country a little. I was thinking perhaps you might show him around."

"I'm so sorry—" she turned apologetic to the young man. "But, perhaps I can this afternoon if you would care to?"

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Carron was angry. Was this Rader's idea of fulfilling his hints? Was this his idea of a companion for hunting? Charming young women with arms reaching out of oblivion like the fabled Lady of the Lake were all very well, but time was slipping by and he must be about a man's business. Yet, what to do, when apparently he had all time on his hands, and the girl was offering him her time so graciously? It was Mrs. Rader who rescued him.

"Oh, Alex, I want Blanche to help me with the quilts this afternoon." She addressed her husband, and then apologized to Carron. "It happens that at this time of year we are most busy, getting the house in order before the rains set in. I hope you won't mind being left to yourself to-day?"

Carron assured her that his wish was not at all to disturb the routine of the place, and that perhaps some other day when Miss Rader had a little time to waste she would— On the whole he was relieved, though he could have wished that the girl had shown some feeling one way or another. But she did not even drop her alert mood to indifference. It was Rader who was disconcerted. He rose, gathering up his book, gave Carron a hasty glance, embarrassed, apologetic, as if he would say, "I have done my best," and murmuring something about not

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being disturbed that morning, went hastily out. His very back was eloquent of a sense of defeat.

"Confound the man," Carron thought; "what ails him? What does he think I want?"

CHAPTER IV

THE WOOD WALK

ABANDONED by Rader, left by the women to the melancholy sight of a spent breakfast table, Carron put on his hat at an exasperated backward angle and opened the outer door.

Little doors opening without the formality of a hall, with delightful directness on the forest, seemed to be a characteristic of this old part of the house. He stepped from one soft greenish light into another deeper and more sharply marked with shadows. A warmer and fresher air met him, and the ground sprung under his feet. The stir of peace was in the underwoods; but peace was not at all what Carron wanted. This veil of branches was monotonous and irritating. He wanted again a glimpse of mountains, of the sudden craggy heads against the sky, of the scattered stone heaps at their feet, of the dramatic lone tree, and the thin river—the country where such a creature as Son of the Wind might inhabit. He walked slowly along the side of the house, looking upon the ground, seeing, in every

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fantastic silhouetted mass of branches, a shadow as of a horse in the sky.

He came to the corner of the house and paused, aimless. He had a sense of losing his hold on the situation. He understood that Rader was a man guarded, both by his isolation at the end of that long passage, and by the vigilance of his straightly-inquiring wife. Furthermore, in this flat mood of the morning, it might be that seeing Rader would do no good at all. No doubt Rader regretted urging him to stay; and was at a loss to know how to make good his random promise of a companion. Practical application of ideas was evidently not the scholar's strong point.

He heard his name called. The voice came from over his head. He raised his eyes. The windows of his room were above him, all opened wide, with curtains drawn back. The flight of outside steps was near to where he stood, and, leaning on the wooden rail of the little balcony, Blanche Rader was looking down upon him. She had a cloth in her hand as if she had been dusting, and a cloth tied over her head. With her hair covered by this trying bandage, all in her face that had passed unnoticed or not been noticed enough started out at him. Her eyes showed bluer, larger, and her eyebrows became a beauty. He saw that her nose

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was inclined to the large, slightly aquiline, but without any look of pinching at the bridge, and with adorable pliant nostrils. Whatever that feature may have given to her face of overmuch will—or obstinacy—the mouth made up for now as it smiled at him.

“Are you going for a walk?” she asked.

He whipped off his hat. “To tell the truth, I don’t know where I’m going.” He hung on his heel, enjoying the sight, and grudging the inroad it made on his concentration. “Everything looks the same to me. Perhaps you will graciously point out a pleasant direction.”

She rested her chin consideringly in her hand. “If you like, I can go with you and show you. I shall have the time. Mother has changed her mind about the up-stairs cleaning. She is going to help father with his books instead.”

Fate, it seemed, had decreed that the morning should be given to this young woman. Or, did he see the hand of Rader obscurely working in the dark? If that were so, he reflected, the bias on Rader’s part was probably due to the fact that there was no one else to commit him to. Yet, for all he knew, the girl herself might be responsible for the alteration of Mrs. Rader’s plan.

Carron resigned himself. “I’d like it,” he de-

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clared with emphasis, and to his surprise realized that he had spoken the truth, "I'd like it above all things."

She gave a slight sidewise inclination of the head, accepting this. "Then, if you'll just wait a moment—" She turned to the door behind her which stood open and entered the room.

He saw her catch up his pillow, give it a pat, and deposit it plump and smooth upon his smoothed up bed, flick her dusting cloth over the top of the bureau, then stoop and gather up his soiled linen from the floor where he had thoughtlessly flung it. This was worse than having her mail his letters for him. He must see that she didn't have to do that again. She matter-of-factly rolled the garments up under her arm, and, coming to one of the open windows, called to him, "I'll send your things to the Chinaman, shan't I; he'll have them done in a few days."

Carron replied that she was very thoughtful. This mixture of domesticity and idyl was confusing.

He watched her close all his windows but one, draw all curtains, and then close the door, shutting herself from sight. There was a moment of silence, and he wondered if, in the interval, she had condescended to take off her sweeping cap in front

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of his mirror. Then he heard the shutting of the inner door. He awaited her in the hall at the foot of the clambering stair. His expectation had not time to sharpen to impatience before she appeared, still in her brown skirt and working blouse, but with the dull cloud of her hair admirably controlled.

"We might go out through the new house," she suggested, and led the way.

The dust of yesterday was gone from the dining-room, but the chairs, covered with cloths, still towered terrifically on the tables. The hard, yellowish light was reflected on them from four directions. She looked up at the ceiling and around at the staring uncurtained windows. "It's a beautiful dining-room," she said; then her unexpected quick turn of the head caught Carron's expression. She smiled, appreciative, but not disturbed by his amusement. "It is a beautiful dining-room," she explained, "it's so convenient. Convenient things look just as beautiful to mother as pretty ones do to us," she added, as their feet made a clatter down the glistening uncarpeted hall. "Of course, the old house is nicer to look at, and to live in; but these rooms are quite nice to dance in, and when I was a child, I used to like to play here. I used to love to make a run, and then slide from there—"

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she indicated with her finger— “down to the front door.”

Carron saw that the æsthetic sense of this young woman had been neglected—he doubted if she knew she had one—and he observed that her body rejoiced in activity. He was altogether entertained and delighted. “You would love to slide now, wouldn’t you?” he inquired.

She glanced sidelong at the floor, but walked demurely. She resisted his invitation, but the invitation of the sky and trees, seen through the open door, she evidently found more potent. Whether she ran or not he wasn’t sure, but her getting over the threshold and half-way down the steps was like nothing so much as the flash of a bird. She looked around her, and back at him, and her animation seemed to have taken a leap. “Which way shall we go?” she inquired.

“Oh, any way! You take me!” Her spirits had caught him. His irritation, his chafings were withdrawn.

“Then I will take you to the spring. It is about the only thing there is to see that we will have time for.”

If he had expected her to race him through the shadows he was to be disappointed. For after that one instant of wildness that had touched her as she

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stood on the threshold, she schooled herself to a leisurely saunter. She had not quite the air of a girl curbed and repressed to her good behavior, but more the air of a girl unconsciously holding much in reserve. What the intenser expression might be one could guess at—but it would be uncertain work. It was her simpler, more exterior self she was giving him now as they walked along the drive. She went in silence a few paces, her lips touched with some amusing thought; then turning to him with the mischievous elation that had first met his eyes when she had entered the dining-room. "I think I have something of yours," she volunteered.

He looked puzzled.

"Didn't you lose something yesterday when you were driving up?"

His hand clapped his watch pocket. "Why I—don't know of anything." He felt quite at sea, though her smiling eyes were accusing him that certainly he must know very well.

She slid her hand into the fold of her skirt where women conceal the mysterious thing they call a pocket. "I felt sure it was yours as soon as I saw you," she said as if there admitted of no doubt on this point. "You came near losing it a second time, too. My pup got it and tried to swallow it." She

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drew her hand slowly out again, enjoying his suspense, showing herself again the child. The sound of a horse's hoofs on the drive in front of them made her pause and look down the brown track. Around a near turn the rider came in view; and she closed her hand tightly, and let it fall at her side. The man on the road, the man the Raders called "Bert," pulled his pony to a walk and got unhandily out of the saddle.

He had seen the girl first. His look at sight of Carron made that unsusceptible person sorry for him. He seemed to consider the possibilities of retreat, then came on unwillingly as if impelled by a combination of appearances which he half hated and half feared.

Coming quite close to them he dragged off his hat. "Good morning, Blanche," his voice was soft and suppressed.

She gave him a clear and rather merciless eye. "Good morning." She seemed to be waiting for him to go by, but he came a little nearer and stopped, his hat clenched nervously in his hand. Evidently the poor devil was in disgrace for his last night's behavior.

"How are you this morning?" Carron said cheerfully.

The man replied sullenly, inaudibly.

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Blanche Rader gave this greeting between the two her pointed surprise.

Carron smiled at her. "Well, aren't you going to show me what you promised?"

She sent a flying look at Ferrier, gave a slight shrug as if to say that after all his being there didn't matter. She held up and opened her hand. "There it is."

Carron looked curiously at the twenty-dollar gold piece. In spite of him the color was coming into his face. He recognized the coin as being new, as being of the date that he remembered.

"Here it is," the girl insisted, holding it out.

To appear surprised was not difficult. "Where did you find it?"

"A little way below where I caught the stage. A stirrup was getting loose and I got off to fix it, and dropped the hair-pin I was fixing it with; just put my hand into the dust to get it again and found this in my fingers!"

Carron raised his eyes, most conscious of the other man's face. It was a study. The fellow had stretched his neck; he was crimson, his mouth a little open, and he looked at Carron in a suspense that was equal to suffering, expecting his next word.

"Of course, I'd like very much to accept it," Car-

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ron said, very much amused by the play, "but unfortunately I have lost nothing of the kind."

She seemed incredulous. "But you—" she began, and Carron was sure she was about to say, "You recognized it"—which was true indeed.

He shook his head. "It isn't mine! Couldn't some one on the stage have lost it—or some one else in this part of the country? You don't happen to know," he said, turning to the man on the road, "of any one around here who has lost such a thing?"

There was a click in the fellow's throat. He seemed to draw breath with a great effort. "It's mine!"

Blanche Rader gave him the full benefit of her amazement. "Why, you—" She started again, "Why, Bert—"

"It's mine; I lost it yesterday!" He drew a trembling hand across his forehead, suddenly damp.

She took him all in, his worn flannel shirt, patched trousers stuck into old boots that needed patching, his whole appearance of a rather reckless poverty; she glanced at Carron. His eye refuted her implication. Its steady insistence expected a certain action from her as it had from the man on the road. She was perplexed, and he thought a little chagrined that her amusing supposition had taken this unexpected

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turn on her, but she held out the gold piece slowly and let it fall into the other man's hand.

The man on the road seemed submerged from thought by some crushing emotion. Expression was washed out of his face; he was nerveless; his throat made a convulsive movement—an attempt for speech; his hand closed on the money, and with a jerk plunged it into his pocket. "I—" he began, but there his tongue stopped; his head drooped, and he turned away. He moved on up the drive, leading his horse as if he had not ambition enough to mount it, and left a quality of silence behind him that was astonishment. "What in the world?" Blanche Rader seemed not to ask of Carron so much as herself. "What in the world is the matter with him?"

Carron's eyes were twinkling. "Probably thought you were going to withhold his proper due."

"But it doesn't seem as if it could be his!"

"Oh, why not?"

She looked at him with smiling scorn, very pretty upon such a tender mouth. "Where would he get it—twenty dollars!"

"He sold a horse," Carron said. He said it to amuse himself. It fitted so nicely into an outward lie and an inward truth; but the expression it summoned in her was amazing—the sudden proud suspicious look her eyes darted, the rush of a red spot

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to each cheek, the quick lift of the bosom. It was gone in a flash, leaving her paler, gone with the long sigh which expelled her fears. "Why, his horse isn't worth ten dollars," she said lightly.

Carron couldn't immediately speak. As quickly as her expression had come and gone—so quickly a supposition had touched his mind. He entertained it not a minute. It wasn't possible! This being who fastened on stirrups with a hair-pin! "What's got me?" he thought. "I'm so possessed with an idea that I accuse every one I see of knowing about it."

Blanche Rader's momentary suspicion, whatever it had been, evidently had blown away. Mere curiosity was left. "Did he tell you he had sold a horse?" she asked.

"I gathered it from what he said."

"Then you've met him before?"

"Yesterday. He very kindly directed me here. He said Raders might take me in and keep me overnight, and so, you see, I am grateful to him."

"Yes, he's obliging." She spoke like one anxious to be fair, but there was a trace of irritation in her voice. "I'm glad if he has made some money, for I'm afraid he needs it terribly. This has been a cruel summer."

"He lives in this part of the country, I suppose?"

"A mile down the main road. The Ferriers have

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been here longer than we have. I've known Bert ever since I was a child." They were walking again, still on the main road, with unending trees around them, and with motion her good humor was returning.

The drama just enacted on the drive had interested Carron, and pricked his curiosity far more than he had shown. What was the girl's mind toward the man on the road, and why, taking the gold piece from her, should the fellow turn upon her such a face. He looked at her himself, and looking thought, "She certainly isn't pretty. She's less—or more." Aloud he said, "And have *you* lived here long?"

"Eight years. The new house has been built since then," she mused. "Of course, the old drawing-rooms were impossible. Their woodwork was rotted, but I was sorry when they tore down the old ball-room."

"The ball-room?" Carron repeated, with an involuntary survey of the solemn prospect of trees.

"Yes, I liked it." Her white teeth flashed at the memory. "It was so funny, and so grand. Leslie de Shallener, the dancer—did you ever hear of her?—she was up here the first summer we had the place; and one night she took me into the ball-room where we were all alone, and no light but moonlight, and

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danced for me. I've never forgotten it. I don't often see things like that."

"I'm sure *I* don't," said Carron. What he was thinking of, however, was the great room, and the large-eyed child, spellbound in the moonlight, with the gyrations of a toe-dancer.

"I think you must have seen a great deal," she answered. "Look, there are the old gate-posts. They ought to have been pulled down long ago, but I am afraid I should miss them. The spring path turns off just here."

He would hardly have known it was a path. To one driving by it would look like a natural opening in the forest. She had to lead him now, the way was so narrow. It showed indications of having been wider once in the short green growth of pine on either side. Some little distance on he saw the fragment of a board hanging gray and rain-worn from a post; farther yet the thin iron legs of a chair—such a chair as one sees around café tables—thrust out of the drift of pine-needles. Between these relics the lithe body of the girl swung at a quick-footing pace, here stooping her head, there lifting a branch aside, now glancing over her shoulder at him. Then, a little in front of him, he saw two hand-rails, tottering, all but collapsing, yet somehow clinging together, and opening out, embracing a sort of in-

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closure. Within was a level space, clear of pines and perhaps thirty feet across. In the center of this Blanche Rader was standing when he came up to her, standing by a circular railing closely boarded below, and with a broad ledge around the top of it inclosing what looked to be a well. An iron bench, scarlet with rust, was toppled upon the ground. The helplessness of its aspect, four legs in the air, and the staggering white rail, gave an air of forlornness to the spectacle which in no way seemed to touch the girl's consciousness. Custom, no doubt, had taken away her vision of the place.

"This is where they used to come in the morning to drink the water," she explained.

Carron was astonished and enlightened. "Do you mean to tell me that this was a health resort, off here at the end of creation?"

She nodded. "'The Giant Mineral Springs Hotel.' Remember the tumble-down sign as you came in the gate? I supposed you knew—but of course mother never speaks of it. She feels so badly about it."

Carron raised interrogative eyebrows at her. "What is wrong with having a health resort?"

She gave him all her smile. "Nothing, if it is a real one. But you see—well, we didn't know when we bought it."

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"You—bought it—" The words were not quite a question, but allowed themselves to be taken as such.

"Not exactly. I don't think any one would ever have done that, do you? Father took it for a debt. A friend of his, a Mr. Janfer, built the place. I think they called it 'Janfer's Folly.' I know he lost money on it. It was a very fine house at the time it was built, but it had been closed so long when we got it, it was dreadfully run down. You see we thought we could sell it. Father thought the mineral springs would be worth something, but when we had them analyzed we found out they were just ordinary water that had been charged with sulphur and iron." She laughed. "Think what Mr. Janfer said when father told him what we had found out! He said, 'Why, of course, I expected that you would do as I did.'"

"And Mr. Rader didn't?"

She shook her head. "Mother wanted to, but he wouldn't let her. She says he doesn't have the problem of running a hotel on not enough; and besides it would be good for the people to drink a lot of water even if it is just plain. But father said he couldn't live a pretense."

"And how about you?" Carron inquired, resting his arm on the well curb. The warm personal look he

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turned on her—the look that had got him so much of what he wanted—took away from the impertinence of curiosity. Indeed, he was more than curious; he was interested, attracted by the unusualness of the three people, struck by their singular surrounding. To himself, if he had thought of himself at that moment, he would have appeared the idlest of idlers, the most disinterested of acquaintances; but, for a fact, he was never disinterested. He had the imagination that works only toward an object. With a faculty he was not aware of he utilized everything. He was utilizing now, unintentionally utilizing this girl, to draw out of her details of character, of opinion, of history, among the people in the small scenario around him—the actors among whom he expected to play a part.

She was a clear well to draw from, but over his last question she took time.

“I mean,” he explained himself, “what would you decide about it?”

“I? Oh, I don’t know. I suppose it would be hard to know all the time that you were cheating people; but the way the thing is now is rather hard on mother.”

“Doesn’t she— isn’t it—” He was afraid he was going too far, but the idea of any one in financial straits, above all these two women, disturbed him

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mightily. Financial assistance was something he understood how to offer very well.

"Oh, yes; we have a number of people in the summer. We do quite well enough in a business way, only if it were a health resort we should do much better; so much better that by and by we could stop, and go somewhere else, and see a different sort of people."

"Doesn't she like the sort of people here?"

"Oh, for herself she doesn't care at all! It's on my account, you see." She made a little grimace. "The people who come here are not 'advantageous'—at least that is what she says."

Carron could easily imagine it. The people who turn up in such out-of-the-way places are those strange people out of nowhere. He could very easily fancy how they would look, sitting around the yellow pine drawing-room in the evenings. "And do you like them?"

"They are more fun than the advantageous people; yes, on the whole, I do."

"And do you like the place?"

"In the summer? Yes, it is rather fun."

"No, at all times, summer and winter. How do you like living here all the year around?"

Evidently she had never considered this before. "I don't know. It's my home."

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"What of that? I never liked my home, and I haven't seen it for ten years."

She had a way of seeming never to have formed an opinion on a subject, but just to meet it for the first time as it was presented to her. At this one she looked surprised and a little dubious. "I like it here well enough." She glanced vaguely around her. "I like it much better than the Sacramento Valley. It's beautiful here when you get off in the mountains." The expression in her eyes grew further away. "Yes, I think I'm happy here. At least," she murmured it as if she had forgotten he was there, "I have been happy this September."

"I hope you're not going to be less happy for the next week." It was horribly crude, the primary personality. Carron blushed for himself, but the result was what he wanted.

Her gaze came back promptly upon him. She did not reply, did not try to turn his sentiment. Actually, with her large arrested gaze, she seemed to consider it. In the pause, in the silence, he felt his foolish platitude was gathering significance. "What can you be to my happiness or unhappiness?" the look of hers seemed to say. Seriousness was the last note he wanted to strike; but in spite of him, it was struck between them. The question in her eyes had provoked the question from his. For a breath, the

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tentative thought was sent out from one to the other, and withdrawn.

"There is one favor I must ask of you," Carron said lightly. "I shall have to let you make my pillows sit up properly, for that I can't do; but I do draw the line at your rubbing down my mare."

It was a chance shot, but it drew fire. "Oh, I enjoy that. I like it better than the housework. George cleans the stalls for me, and usually does the horses. I only oversee, but I curried yours for the fun of it. She is such a beauty, and she was quite glad to see me."

"Naturally! She'll be delighted to carry you, too. Perhaps some day when you have time you will be good enough to try her."

"Oh, I should love to!"

Her fervor quickened him with a feeling of companionship for her. "You like them, don't you?"

"Horses?" Her hesitation surprised him. "Oh, yes, I like them well enough. They are lovely!" She meditated, then added, "But they're so silly."

"Silly?"

"Yes; letting us put steel in their mouths, and stick steel into their sides, and pull their heads about with reins—giving in to us and obeying us, when they could trample us into nothing!"

He drew down the corners of his mouth and shot

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up his eyebrows at her. "But sometimes they do trample us into nothing."

"Not often." She spoke as if it were to be regretted.

"My bloodthirsty young friend!" He threw back his head and laughed until the desolate old spring walk and well echoed. "Don't you believe in the Christian virtues of meekness and obedience?"

"No—they're stupid. They're all right for children, and dogs; but for splendid crashing things like horses—"

He looked at her curiously. The faint color was coming up under her dusky white skin, not rose, but a duller, more passionate hue. Her head had turned slowly to the profile, and again he felt her thought was traveling away from him. She did not see, as Carron saw, a long slow-dancing shadow coming down the walk between the gray hand-rails. The approach of feet was soundless on the forest's strewn carpet. She did not see her father as he dawned between the close pine branches.

He stopped just at the threshold of the inclosure, a queer figure astray in the trees, an indoor figure, one that would have been at home at a desk, or that would have known its way about among bookshelves. His glasses were pushed up, his foggy hair was distracted on his head, his hands plunged deep in his pockets. In the warm, out-of-door light

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he looked more dry, more lined, more than ever built of thoughts, without actions. His survey was straight before him at his dreaming daughter. Carron had never seen him look at any one so deliberately, so concentratedly or so long. This time there was a deal more than affection in his face; there was introspection, there was a philosophic smile.

When his eyes moved, they moved rapidly. They met the young man's with an interrogation, pointed, peculiar, unaware of itself, and the more unguarded because of that. "How is it? Well, what did you find out?" he seemed to demand. Carron felt suddenly limp. The significance of the question seized him before he could challenge it. For once he was captured and carried off his feet by another man's conviction. He received it as a fact, reflected upon him from the scholar's candid, inquisitive face. The duel of looks—"Can you mean it?" answering "Did she tell you?"—passed between them, across the distance, shifted, and with a common instinct merged into a direct regard of the girl. She sat above them, forgetful of the one, unaware of the other, looking over their heads at the invisible something she saw, far away from this time and place. She appeared an unfamiliar creature, suddenly of importance, of tremendous significance. "A woman!" he thought; and, with a mixed sense of amazement and incredulous delight repeated, "A woman, good Lord, a woman!"

CHAPTER V.

IMPROBABILITIES

AS long as his mind remained astonished into receptiveness, passive to the sharp point of the scholar's thought, so long Carron believed the conviction that had been thrust upon him. For that time he saw his adventure simplified. It spread before him definite and clear to get through as open land come upon abrupt from forest. But, no sooner had the recoiled reason time to gather itself than the reaction of feeling began; the rallying of logic, when the positive combative brain seized the question, pulling it apart; the rushing in of doubts from all sides; the swift review by skepticism of what was probable or improbable; and, last, the laughter! It was inaudible. It shook him inwardly. A woman? What had the sound of that word to do with the idea of a wild horse? Women, those creatures without initiative, compelled in their excursions into the wilderness to certain spaces and to limited hours, whose adventures, when they had them, were always unoriginal—the mere repetition of some man's greater

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adventure—how should one of these chance upon a discovery unusual and heroic?

The scholar had come a step forward, and now tentatively lifted his voice. "Blanche?" he said.

She turned, startled from her dream, wavered in uncertain balance, and snatched at something to support herself. Carron grasped her outflung hand. It was warm and smooth, with a remarkable live feeling as of some captured little animal. It rested unconscious of what held it, preoccupied, intense. Whatever feeling possessed this girl seemed to possess her completely, head to heel. Her surprise at sight of her father had run into her finger-tips. "What is it?" she asked, leaning forward.

"Your mother says she is waiting for you to stitch the quilts," he explained, advancing. "I've been looking for you all over the hill."

"But why didn't she blow the horn? Why should she send you? I don't believe she did," Blanche Rader objected mischievously to the scholar's diffident glance. "It is Mr. Carron who has waked you up and got you out." She lowered her eyes to the young man with a smile, realized her hand was still in his, smiled a little more with a faint nervous quiver at the corners of her mouth, and her fingers slipped from his. She slid from the well-curb before he could help her. "I'm sorry," she said, "I

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shall have to go back." She seemed to interrogate as to whether the two men would accompany her.

The print of her fingers was still warm in Carron's palm, the brief part she had played of principal in his drama keen in his fancy, the impulse was, follow! But Rader was the person his logic wanted, and Rader showed no disposition to move from the spot where he stood. He put thumb and finger into his pocket, drew out a little yellow-bowled pipe, lit it and leaned back against the edge of the well. "You will have to hurry, won't you?" he asked his daughter.

"Don't let us detain you," Carron said.

She gave an amused, puzzled glance, as if she thought her father's behavior a little odd. "Very well," she said, "then, since you're so good, I will run."

She did not turn back along the way they had come, but dipped into the wood where the hill rose steepest, running like a lapwing, enjoying the quick motion, smiling as she darted among the trees. Golden-brown and white in the sun, and dusky white and dark-brown in shadow, she retreated up the irregular aisle of branches, and Carron, watching her flight, wondered. A woman like that, long-throated, light moving, pliant and elusive! When she had frowned on him, asking if she were a

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hunter; when she had leaned on the balcony as the high priestess of housework, even when she had spoken of currying his horse, there had been no hint of the Amazon. She had worn a graceful air, social and schooled, suggesting the walled inclosure where women are supposed to play. There was no hint of the Amazon now—not that; only a suggestion of wildness afield, of moods that might not be held to the beat of regulated hours. And there had been other moments that morning, curious moments, when she had shown inexplicable looks. He recalled how she had sat dreaming on the old spring curb with eyes of imagination fixed on some place far off. “Splendid trampling things like horses,” she had said, and he remembered how the color had come up in her face. Well, a girl’s fancies! but what of that time he had called the spot of alarm to her cheeks? What of the glance she had darted at him and his joke about the selling of a horse, suspicious, quick as a sword? His mind fluctuated between credulity and a smile.

The scholar was pulling thoughtfully on his pipe, his eyes, at intervals, making excursions to the young man’s face. “He believes it,” Carron reflected, “yes, by Jove, he does!” The singular old chap, always in the clouds, knowing nothing real until it was translated into the unreal, his belief was not much reassur-

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ance! How could a man tell in what foggy ways he came by his ideas? Evolved them out of his own imagination, perhaps. That was the devilish part of people with imaginations. But there was the man on the road. Certainly that fellow had seemed to have his feet firmly planted on earth, and his eyes sharp for the things of it. Certainly he had betrayed the qualities of the materialist, who will make sure of his fact before he takes it seriously. And had not he looked toward the girl as the keeper of the secret? "Try Raders," he had said. Hadn't he meant, "Try Blanche Rader?" The memory of how those two had looked when they had stood together on the drive, and the fellow had taken the gold piece from her, came back a clear little picture. In the light of his new knowledge the thing had an ugly look. He could see how the man might sell her confidence; but to take the money from her hand! To be sure it had been only a way by which the thing had reached a destination for which it was first intended. But there were ways, Carron thought, which were worse than the object they gained.

He caught himself drifting just on the edge of credulity. So many appearances thrust him there; yet, when he thought, after all, they were but appearance—looks surprised out of faces, at the moment more convincing than a vocabulary, but, as

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soon as they disappeared, leaving the reason doubtful they had ever existed. He had not had the reassurance of the audible word, which leaves an echo in the ear as well as in the mind, and gives a basis to think from. Not even that, yet the scholar who had come out to find him was evidently confidently expecting he had something to tell.

He drew a deep breath for his dive into unknown waters. He thrust his hands in his pockets, walked a little meditative half circle on the soft piny floor of the forest, and came to a stop square in front of Rader. "Well!" he said with a falling inflection.

"Well?" Rader replied interrogatively and smiling.

"You might have told me in the first place. You would have saved me some trouble."

Rader breathed a cloud of smoke, and waited.

"What does she want of the horse?" Carron said quietly. He said it so quietly one could hardly think any risk attached to it or any suspense for him.

Rader took his little yellow-bowled pipe out of his mouth, "Didn't she tell you?"

The question fell pat and natural as if this were some old, often discussed matter which both understood well enough. Carron felt that he was smiling rather foolishly. He shook his head.

Rader's pipe, still suspended in his hand, sent up

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a little cloud before his face as he leaned forward. "What *did* she tell you?" he asked.

"The truth is, I don't believe she knows she's told me anything," Carron confessed. "In a manner of speaking, I got it out of her."

Rader knitted his forehead. This way of approaching the matter seemed scarcely to his fancy. "Better ask her straight," he said laconically.

"What she wants of it?"

"Yes, and whether she's seen it, too. Better have it all square from the first; let her know what you're after."

"Do you think she would tell me?"

"Lord knows," said the scholar, with a humorous eye; "I never do!"

"She told you." He was making assumptions as fast as he could find them, and every time Rader transformed them into facts.

"That is different. She tells me everything because I don't care. What would an old fellow like me care? She might just as well go whisper it to one of those stone heads on the mountain up yonder."

Carron restrained a smile at the scholar's idea of what a tight vessel he was for a secret. "She told Ferrier," he urged.

"Did she say that?"

"No; you did."

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"I did?" Rader looked distressed. "I haven't said anything!"

Carron realized his slip, but there was nothing now for it but to brazen the thing out. "Not in so many words. But you did say last night, don't you remember? that Ferrier hadn't given away *your* confidence. From which I inferred that he had given away some one else's; from which I now infer that he had given away Miss Rader's, and therefore that she must have told him something in the first place—you see?"

"Lord," said Rader, "you infer a good deal, don't you?" Both of them were at broad grin, but the scholar's was a little sheepish. "I did let go of it there, didn't I?" he admitted. He mused. "All the same, I don't think she told Bert Ferrier about it." He turned, and looked thoughtfully down into the dark mouth of the well as if he hoped to see truth lurking in it. Then, putting his pipe back in his mouth and getting gradually into his long slipshod stride, he began to saunter away across the clearing toward the trees, following the direction his daughter had taken a little while before.

Carron caught step with him. He was afraid by that unlucky remark of his that he had startled his man to caution; and indeed, striding on through sun and shadow, Rader kept silence for some minutes.

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Yet he had not so much the air of a person mum as of one musing, and turning over a question. Carron could see it ruminating in his eyes, and expressed in the fluctuating cloud of his pipe as they climbed the ascent among the pines, startling the blue wings of birds into flight among the branches. Noon was in the air, the languor of it. They dipped into a little depression, began another more gradual rise, and presently sighted the line of the hotel roof; a little higher, glimpses of windows came into view between the trunks of trees; and, last, a long white-washed covered passage, with a little round room at the end of it, extending from the back of the house. It projected into the pines like a promontory into the sea, and they, the incoming craft, voyaging toward it. Carron recognized this must be the scholar's study. A piazza was in front of it, evidently but the continuation of the broader one that clung all around the house. Three wooden steps led up to it. At the foot of these Rader paused. He leaned back against the rail and spoke as if no silence had intervened.

"It wouldn't have been like her to tell him," he said argumentatively. "She's too close-mouthed, and, besides—" he mused and puffed—"not that his knowing would matter any more than mine," he took up another sentence. "He's nothing of a rider.

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He wouldn't want the horse himself. "She's been sure enough that he would never take it away from her."

The way he put it struck coldly on Carron's expectant nerves. He heard in it the explanation of the whole mysterious business—the explanation, and that always meant the descent from the high idea to the reasonable and the ordinary. There was a horse, oh, no doubt! He could believe that now; but it was not the thing it had been represented. It was not his leader of herds, Son of the Wind, but a creature less than marvelous, already touched by the hand of man. He looked the possibility in the face. Over the ruin of his crazy expectations he could smile at it. "Then the horse isn't afraid of her?"

Rader looked at him in astonishment. "Isn't afraid? Why, bless my soul, it's as wild as the wind."

"As wild as the wind!" The mere sound of the words in his ears was delight. "And she can't even come near it?"

"Bless my soul," said Rader again, "it's never even seen her. She has been very careful about that."

"But how does she see it? Where?" He was all a-wonder.

"Ask her—ask her!" Rader insisted.

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“And suppose she won’t answer?”

Rader shrugged, as who would say, “Then, that will be the end of it.”

The young man laughed. The thing would not end as simply as all that. If Blanche Rader would not speak— His conjecture didn’t get further, for he believed that she would. Rader was looking at him expectantly, as if he thought to see the question put to test on the instant. And why not? Now was a better time than any; and the scholar’s eye, quiz-zical, hinting that perhaps the undertaking was a daunting one, put him on his mettle. He pulled his hat over his nose, ran up the steps, and turning to the right, walked quickly down the side piazza.

For an interval there was wall, without opening; and then began a series of low-set square windows, which “Janfer,” in his celebrated “Folly,” had ornamented with wooden cornices of acanthus. He passed the first, since it was covered with a curtain, the curtains to the second were drawn back, and from within he heard a sound like a large and much occupied bee. Broad noon made it hard to look into the house, but by stepping back to the railing, holding his hand over his eyes and tipping his head, he was able to see the room. The greater part of it was in shadow. Mrs. Rader’s figure was barely distinguishable, back toward him, stooping above a ta-

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ble, and, like the clipping "Fate," with shears in her hand, but drawn near to the window and the light was a sewing-machine over which flowed a cascade of stuff, heavy and white; and moving this through the machine, manipulating it delicately, Blanche Rader sat. Her head was bent. He saw the greater mass of her hair like a shadow, the light on her forehead, and the long, dim line of her throat as she leaned sidewise. She was very intent, seeing no one, all her wits apparently stitching into that sewing. He smiled. Anything more gentle, and accessible, one could not imagine. But the figure in the background made him wary. He had had an impression of it as an interfering element. He reached in his pocket and found a scrap of paper and a pencil. Resting this on his address-book he wrote, "Eight-thirty A. M. to-morrow, horseback. Will you?"

He went up to the window, pressed the card against the glass and drummed his fingers softly on the pane.

The machine stopped, ran back a little way. She looked up quickly, and though he must have been but a black figure against daylight to her, he saw she recognized him immediately; then her eyes fixed on the white paper. She was a while about it. He could not tell whether she was re-reading his message to get a better understanding of it, or whether she was

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merely considering it as a proposition. At last she looked at him. Eyes and lips smiled with pleasure. She nodded. Then, bending forward again and reaching into the intricacies around the needle, she disentangled the long thread, and resumed her seam, as if nothing had shadowed in the window to snap it, or to put a fresh thought in her mind.

CHAPTER VI

WILD THINGS AND TAME

A SIGNAL and a smile through the window. They had taken few words to understand each other, he thought. The promise of a morning among the hills with this responsive girl whetted anticipation sharp. The way his adventure led was going to be pleasant and very easy, the merest short-cut. If only he did not feel so deadly uncertain that there was anything at the end of it! He tried to make himself believe that what she had seen was indeed the thing he wanted; but he doubted that women saw things as they were. He knew he himself desired the perfect material object; that he was sensitive to every failure of what he saw to fulfil this, recognizing defect and perfection and calling them by name. But he suspected that around any sort of object a woman could fold her imagination and transform it to herself. He had seen miserable figures of men thus translated, and how would it be in the lesser matter of a horse? Those large imaginative eyes of hers looked very ready to believe wonders. No doubt they were

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starved for things wonderful, the thrill given to the nerves by the sight of unwonted beauty or strength—all the quicker to be credulous because of that. Had she seen a plow pony by moonlight? He smiled to think of her as she would be with her bright intensity leading him to the place where she had seen her vision, some place of water, no doubt, where the creature, whatever it was, came to drink, where sooner or later—perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the day after—he would see it.

The nearness of discovery made him restless. It would be hard to close his eyes before they had held that revelation. His sleep that night was thin, a veil across his consciousness. It dissolved with dawn, and he wondered whether they might not make an earlier start than half-past eight.

Getting away for a morning's ride seemed a simple business. As far as himself was concerned, the preliminaries were something to eat and saddling. But, for the girl, it appeared they were far more complicated, involving a multitude of employments and errands around and in and out of the house. As early as half-past six, when he first got up, looking through his curtain he saw her in the pale ruddy light, already intent with haste, a long lock of hair falling across her cheek, laying out mattresses and pillows to air on the ground.

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Later, hurrying down the outside stair with the thought of helping her at this task for which her back looked too slender, he found himself alone in a dead sea of ticking. The windows of the scholar's study were open, and through them he heard the sound of a hummed song, and saw her figure moving to and fro. Later yet, on his way through the hall, he glimpsed her in a room, sweeping vigorously, the center of a haze of dust which the new sun transformed to a golden vapor.

"You haven't forgotten, have you?" he asked looking in the door.

She formed "No," with her mouth through the thick, bright, floating atmosphere. She had this to do first, she explained, and advised him that breakfast was on table. She came into the dining-room herself presently, stayed long enough to drink some coffee and find the scholar's pipe for him, then was away. Carron heard the rattling of tins in the kitchen as if the preliminaries of dish-washing were hers. With verve and incredible despatch she seemed to be crowding her responsibilities for the day into an hour and a half, and only for the sake of a morning at liberty among the hills.

He saddled the two horses, putting the side-saddle on the chestnut, and brought them around to the steps of the old wing. He hoped to find Blanche

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Rader waiting there for him, but, as he rode up, he saw her standing on the side piazza talking to the boy George.

This individual started up to sight and memory like a gnome. He was standing close to the girl. She had hold of a button of his coat, establishing that communication of touch which seemed necessary to get his understanding, and the creature was looking up at her with eyes like a dog's. It set Carron's teeth on edge to see them thus. She was talking with him, not as Mrs. Rader had, but conversationally, with a sweet familiar vivacity. She gesticulated, seeming to employ the sign language as well as the language of words, finally waved her hands toward the drive and the trees, like Ariel dismissing some undersized, unassuming Caliban. He moved off down the steps, dragging his feet. She turned, saw Carron, nodded promisingly and ran in at the door.

He waited, fretting hotter than the chestnut. The whole front of the house seemed to have fallen asleep. But, from the back, presently he thought he heard voices. He thought they came from the other side of the door which closed the inner end of the front hall. He was not listening. The talking reached him as impersonally as the running of water or the flowing of wind; but, as it continued, wearing in on his consciousness, the sound of it grew on

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his ears as an argument. He sensed discordances in it. He fancied long questions and short answers. He got out of saddle and stood restively, every moment glancing behind him. It was monstrous to take time for discussion of domestic problems now with the golden point of the morning already turning pale.

At last the door at the end of the hall opened and let through immediate and near the sound of Mrs. Rader's voice. Blanche Rader was coming out, her hat pulled hard on her head and drawing on her gauntlets. But her mother had followed her, was still speaking to her, and had made her pause to listen by the natural expedient of clasping a hand around her daughter's arm. Held, arrested, the girl stood, still fronted for the door, but with head flung back, to give her mother an ear. Mrs. Rader was arguing. The girl listened perforce. Her expression was icy obstinacy, disclaiming everything said before it was heard. She made an inaudible, rapid answer, freed herself with the impetuous motion of a colt breaking through a fence, and came on toward him. A little of the fretted, haughty look which the interruption had brought stayed like a blush upon her face and darkened in her eyes, giving her a momentary beauty.

"Headstrong, touchy little devil," he thought,

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fancying her for the qualities he deplored. She stood in the doorway, this time with leggings covering her slender ankles, her old brown skirt aswing to her light motion, youth on tiptoe, inquisitive and filled with the conviction that life is joy. She had ruthlessly turned her back on her mother and had approached the stranger confidently, as if from him she expected all pleasant happy things.

"Am I to ride the pretty one?" she asked.

"She's yours, but look out for her. She hates the side-saddle. Why do you use such an antiquated piece of furniture?"

"I always have; I've had it since I was a little girl. Besides, I like it better." She slipped nimbly into her place. "All right," she said.

He released the bridle, and immediately the chestnut was half-way across the loop of the drive. He watched a moment to make sure that she was equal to the mare's dancings and side-glidings; then turned, and looked over his shoulder at the woman standing in the dark end of the hall. "It's all right," he said; "the mare is perfectly safe. I broke her myself."

Mrs. Rader looked at him with a dumb anxiety. Her smile, assumed as if by main force, from the conviction that she must, intensified the unconscious appeal she fixed on him.

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"I'll bring her back safe and sound!" he declared cheerfully, putting toe in the stirrup. "Queer thing," he thought as the mustang, with quick little feet, carried him abreast the mare's limber stride. He looked critically at his companion. She had coerced the chestnut from curves and gambits into a forward and sufficiently rhythmical motion, and was so occupied with the continuance of this that she did not feel the scrutiny. She had the body of the rider, supple back, thinking hands and wiry thighs. He thought he recognized in her the rider's mind, intuition before thought, and a sublime confidence. "Your mother ought to have faith in your horsemanship," he remarked.

"Why, but she does! what makes you think she doesn't?" The question was shot at him with surprise.

"She seemed so mighty anxious when you came out, and afterward when we went off together I got the idea she was afraid of something."

"Oh," said Blanche Rader, "oh, I see!" and began laughing. "Perhaps it was on account of having a strange horse," she suggested, and looked at him with bright eyes of amusement.

He felt sulky. He could stand being laughed at, but to be surveyed as if his appearance somehow had a part in the joke was irritating.

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"I feel very frivolous this morning," she explained. "There is nothing really to laugh at. It is only that mother thought I ought not to run off for a whole half day, and leave everything on her shoulders."

Carron understood that this did not fully account for Mrs. Rader's expression, but if the girl wanted to offer it as an explanation he could take it as such. "She expects you to have some time off, doesn't she?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, and of course I do." She was silent for a moment, manœuvering the chestnut between the white gate-posts—"but now, when we are so busy with the house, it is hard. We have to do everything ourselves. There is only George to help, and when I am away he doesn't help so very well."

"Doesn't understand much of anything that is said to him, does he?" Carron asked.

"Oh, yes, he understands a great deal, a great deal more than any one supposes. But if he doesn't want to do a thing he seems not to know anything; or else he hides. He has a little burrow down below the barn, and he goes into it like a rabbit. Lots of times I've pulled him out of it. He's very sharp." She bent her head broodingly, and light and shadow fluttered in an unending procession of curious little shapes across her face. "It's hard to tell sometimes

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just where his understanding begins and ends," she said. "Mother tries to reason with him, but you can't reason with George. He hasn't any. You have to persuade him to do things."

"I suppose he'll do anything for you?"

"He'll do more for me than for any one else; but that is only because he feels that we are friends, and then I take more time with him. I spent twenty minutes this morning persuading him to scrub down the stairs. I couldn't have come if he hadn't, but I felt wicked to do it. Poor George hates housework as much as I do!"

"I wish you wouldn't compare yourself to that half-witted lump."

"Why?"

"He's hideous."

"*Is he?*" She seemed to meditate the matter. "I know, of course, that he is different from us, but I know him so well, and when you do you don't notice people's faces—that is, you don't notice them if they are not pretty."

"No doubt," Carron said grudgingly. "Beauty being only skin deep, and all that, I suppose is all very beautiful, but I feel uncomfortable every time that boy comes near me—or you."

"How queer that is! I don't mind a bit. I suppose it's because I'm not reasonable."

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Carron looked at her. The horses were moving slowly side by side, and the flicker above their heads had become a warm and constant shadow of branches which let through the influence of the sun without its positive light. It was thus her face should be seen, he thought, under translucent shades of leaves, where her skin looked paler and more perfect, and her eyes darker. "Of course, you are not reasonable," he affirmed. "I hope you are not even sensible. I've enough sense and reason myself to keep me bored for the rest of my life."

This thrust at her weaknesses, far from antagonizing her, seemed to please her to the edge of laughter. "What do you expect me to supply?" she asked, "the madness?"

"Yes, and the zest. Which way are you going to take me to-day?"

"Which way do you want to go?"

There was no hesitation in Carron's mind. He felt himself invited to his fate. "How about getting into the mountains?"

"Half a day," she mused. "It isn't enough time for them, but we can go toward them. We can get into the hills."

The horses quickened pace as the road drew downward, carrying them into the chilly shadow, with no sun behind it, that still covered the gulch. The smell

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of earth before sunrise was here, making them shiver and hurry. They turned into the main road, not retracing the way Carron had ridden two days before, but to the left, continuing along a grade that followed the course of the creek bed for a little, and then climbed higher, left the empty stream behind, and lifted them into the joy of open spaces and full sun. With the horses at hard trot, now drawn apart, now side by side, each wild with a desire to outstrip the other, the communication of the riders was no longer by words, but by community of looks, and in mutual sensation, feeling the same rhythm of motion, seeing the same shadows running toward them and flitting backward, with expanded nostrils taking in the same dry, pure air, and facing together the bright north. The sky was the color of pale turquoise and promised heat, but the sun still struck yellowly from the east, and where for a little way trees closed in about the road a chill lay in the shadow. They descended into shallow hollows; they breasted the baldish tops of long waves of land, each seeming to lift them a little higher than the last. On the left they saw flitting glimpses, now of a bit of blue sky-line, now the pale brown glimmer of a valley; on the right a rougher country, of forest; and beyond, the sharp, high heads of the chain of sugar-loafs, which marked the course

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of the cañon, were constant against the sky. Sometimes, with a wave of the arm toward them, she pointed out a peak, a tree, or a contortion of stone giving them their names. "There is Mount Wendel! That is Barney's Sword over there! That is the Witches' Well!" But she did not cry out upon their beauty or strangeness, nor call upon him to admire, any more than she would have remarked upon the appearance of friends she was introducing to him. She only looked at these things, and seemed to become more informed with their beauty, and more happy. She put back her hat, and the wind loosened the short locks of her hair. Her riding-skirt fluttered like a little flag.

Upon the curtain of the male landscape, sculptural, angular, definite, whose subtleties were of mass, and the relation of mass, so large they escaped the eye, she, with her flowing lines, and the curl of her body in the side-saddle, looked like a small runaway wisp. To see her now he could not believe that she had ever rattled dishes in a pan, or bound a dusting-cap around her head. She had changed like the dryad escaped from her tree, and the farther they entered into the wilderness of hills, the more wildly she seemed to enter into the mood of motion. They raced on the level, and around the sharp lips of declivities, the chestnut—the swifter—forging

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steadily to the front, until what Carron saw of his companion, was a view of back-thrown shoulders, the back of a head, and flying horse's hoofs. So she drew ahead of him, dropping down into the shallow valley, and took the rise at an increasing speed.

He had had the feeling she was getting beyond him and away from him, and now he began to fear the mare was getting away from her. He noted this anxiously. It was useless to hope to catch up with her now. He rose in his stirrups and shouted her name, at the same time thinking that he might as well call to a bird. The brow of the hill was bare and sharp where the road curved over, and he saw the little figures of horse and woman poised there as if about to launch forth and take flight into the pale blue sky.

Flight was the illusion. They were stopping. He could see the rocking motion in the mare's head and shoulders as she came down in her pace. He saw they were turning and finally had stopped just upon the summit. There they stood, waiting for him. The girl was shading her eyes with her hand. "What do you want?" she called.

"To keep you from breaking your neck!" Her docility in halting at a word from him astonished him, but he was rather indignant at her coolness. "If

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you had let her keep that gait she would have been past handling," he said as he rode up.

"Oh, I don't think so."

"I do," said the horse-breaker with the air of concluding an argument.

She seemed quite unimpressed. "Anyway, we got up the hill quickly. See over there, that's where we're going."

Their way, which had carried them upward over long undulations of land, had finally led them out on the backbone of a watershed. He looked around the circle of the landscape, over hills and tops of trees. His glance followed where her finger pointed down the road, indefinitely descending in front of them, bending a little toward the left through a blind and lumpish-looking country. It had an appearance of having been sandpapered off with no edges left, nor characteristic excrescences in sight, nothing to catch the eye. He looked to the right. There lay the thing worth seeing, the line of eminences, the outriders of the cañon, visible now from heel to head. They were so near that he could count the trees on their sides and note the varying yellows of the earth. They made a wall, their feet in cairns of stone, their shoulders interlocked, only their crests—turret-like, steeple-like, cap-like—appearing separate on the sky. Each succeeding group seemed

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a little higher, a little more pronounced and dramatic in form, until the two just opposite the watershed appeared the commanders of the column.

One showed an almost perpendicular cliff, a waterfall of rock; the other was but half its height, a slide of earth, topped by a collar of sandstone, which in turn was crowned by a shape of rock like a great head. Helmet-like pieces clung on either side, and though there was nothing so grotesque as a projection upon its front to suggest any feature, nevertheless the smooth great face wore an expression implacable and mysterious as that of the sphinx. Wherein it lurked—a scarcely discernible beetling hinting at a forehead, a modeling that might have been a cheek, a floating shadow like a faint evanescent smile—was impossible to say. He discerned, but could not detect it.

Yet it was neither this head nor its neighbor which most struck his attention, but the thing which, together, they made. For one point of the helmet, thrusting out, overlapped the waterfall of stone. From there the side of the face cut under and away from it into the sharp hollow of the neck, and swelling again into the projecting collar, made thus a little window through which shone the strange blue jewel of the distance. He looked upon white lights and shadows, and lines of summits half seen

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and half imagined by the eye. In the setting of the solid wall it appeared a hundred times more bright and marvelous than with the graduated lines of distance between, nearer, yet more improbable.

"What is the name of that?" he said.

"What? where?" She looked in all directions but the right one.

It seemed odd that she, who had pointed out so many objects less remarkable, should not be on familiar terms with this one, and look instinctively in the right direction. "There," he said.

Her head came around very slowly toward the thing he indicated. "Oh!" her glance rested upon it for a moment. "You mean that gap? It hasn't any name."

"It looks as if it had," Carron insisted.

"Oh, there are lots of gaps," she said vaguely.

"But this one seems to lead direct into the heart of the mountains."

"No, it is much farther than you think."

"Couldn't we get through?"

"I am afraid it is impossible."

"Have you ever tried?"

She turned around upon him with a smile. "Do you want me to take your good mare and jump through?"

It was a pretty little vision that brought up, a

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piece out of a fairy tale. "No, you've done all the equestrienne feats you are going to do this morning," he declared, and let her lead him away.

He let her lead him from the subject as well as from the sight. It was not the time to press questions now, while they were borne along in the bright tide of action, their attention scattered, their minds lulled, their eyes satisfied with the sight of each other, as pictures—the sense of each other as persons, as magnets, cut off by the stream of the wind. It needed inaction, a sitting side by side looking over one constant piece of landscape, idle hands, broken talk, drifting into personal questions to set them venturing into the dangerous debatable land, the exchange of ideas which sometimes brings such amazing confidences. He began to spy about for some temporary stopping-place. The watershed was already grown tall behind them, and they were winding endlessly in and out among a brown tumble of hills. These looked like the young children of the mountains, crowned with unformed outcroppings of stone. Their growth of pine was scant and immature. The sun beat dazzlingly through it. He looked up wishfully at their little rocky crowns.

"Aren't you tired?" he asked the girl.

"I could keep on all day," she said.

"So could I, but I would so much rather sit on

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a cool rock under a tree and listen to your opinions of the universe."

She laughed. "I shall certainly have to invent them then."

"That's easy enough. The problems of the universe are nothing to the problem of where two people are going to find some shade."

"I know where there is some," she said.

He gazed. Sky, hill, rocks, all bright and naked. "Where?"

"Just around the corner."

He thought she meant the next bend in the road, but she turned the mare's head promptly from the beaten track, and pricked the indignant beauty into as blind a bit of country as Carron ever cared to see. They threaded, by Lilliputian passes, among tiny mountains. Which of the many doubles and twists was the "corner" she had so flippantly alluded to, was impossible to tell. She flickered around them easily and unhesitatingly. They were so many turns of the village street to her. He had all he could do to keep her in sight.

"How many times have you gone over this?" he inquired rather breathlessly, as they slipped through an acute angle between two knolls.

"All times!" she threw the equivocal answer over her shoulder, and bringing the chestnut's head

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about, made an impetuous set at a white-grassed hill-side.

Up they went, over a surface ashy blond and slippery as glass—bad footing for horses, and not a tree in sight; but she lifted the mare with firm touch, without a stumble, and went like one who has knowledge of her direction.

“She’s sure of herself! she’s got a lot of confidence,” he thought, and secretly applauded the virtue. It was one of his own, and he understood it.

They came out on a summit much larger than the little peaks around it and broken into two levels. The one that had faced their ascent was rocky and high, with odd individual little bushes dodging here and there; but, as the ground dropped away, the rock grew scander and the bushes thickened, grew taller, drew closer together, developed mature form, until, upon the farther edge of the hill appeared a small company of cedars. They looked older than the hills around them, so low a man could scarcely stand upright under them, contorted, rigid as if cut of stone. It seemed as though no wind blowing could move such branches.

At the entrance of this prophet’s retreat the girl slid, panting and smiling, into Carron’s hands. “The only shade in this section of country,” she remarked. “I found it by myself.” Leaving him to fasten the

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horses, she turned into a lightly worn path, and walked forward through the trees. Following her presently, he found her sitting on the other side of the grove, leaning against an ancient cedar bole. Her head was dropped back until it rested upon the rough bark, and she was gazing up into the solid shade above her head. He stretched himself full-length on the ground beside her. It was not the most comfortable position in the world, lying on one's side, supporting one's head with one's hand, but it was thus he had the fullest view of her face, and also he had noticed a tendency in women to look more readily at a man if they could look down upon him. Her body had passed from vivid activity into complete repose. Even the fingers that lay near his were relaxed. Her breast rose and fell gently with lengthening breath. "How do you like my trees?" she asked.

Carron looked critically upward. "They are a rather unusually hard-featured lot. I seem to see a good many fists shaken up there in those branches, and that old fellow you seem to have confidence in looks ready to murder me."

"Oh, that's why they are beautiful. They are like a lot of brigands. I love them!" Her large white lids drooping showed but a narrow gleam between black lashes as she looked down at him.

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"You should see them at sunrise. The light comes through them then, and they look as if they were on fire."

He raised himself on his elbow the better to consider this surprising girl. "You know the place rather well, don't you?"

"Yes. I've been here often. The third week in May the moon rises over there when the sun sets over there. It's cold, but very pretty, pink on one side and silver on the other, and the trees always black."

He was amused. "You seem to like odd hours."

She turned this over, another of the things she had never reflected upon. "I think I do—don't you?"

He reflected in his turn. "I believe I've never had the chance to find out. My mother, a most excellent lady, brought me up on schedule time—so many hours walk before breakfast, so many spoonfuls of porridge, and so forth. I believe she had my father well in hand before I appeared on the scene, and I seem to remember that we both went to bed when she told us to."

She looked ready to believe he was joking. "How odd that is! Father and I have always done exactly as we wanted."

"So I have noticed. Mrs. Rader is very gentle. I

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like women to be gentle. My mother was what is called capable. I used to wonder how she ran the church society, and the improvement society, and the other society, and the house, and still had so much energy left for me." His lip twitched with amusing memories. "She had the strongest convictions—she called them principles—and the strongest will of any human being I have ever known, and she had a way of imposing them. She kept me under that thumb of hers until after I was in college. In my junior year I suddenly woke up to the fact that I didn't have to mind her. Funny the way it came, like a bolt out of the sky. I kicked over the traces, took what little was mine of the estate and came out here, out west."

"But then you were free? You could do what you wanted to then?" He smiled. Evidently that was what she had never done.

"Oh, as to being free, I didn't know what it was. I thought it was what you think it—like traveling through space above the earth; I thought it was going to be like one prolonged spree. Lord, how things narrowed down around me! I bought some ranching interests. I've got more now, and a lot of men to work it, and all the incidental stuff to keep the two, the men and the land, going. And I get up at sunrise, and go to bed at ten o'clock in a

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way my mother would applaud; and everything on the ranch gets up and gets down when I tell it to, and I run that thing on schedule time! Free? No, I've lost that somewhere."

She laughed. "You're like your mother, aren't you?"

"Oh, Lord!" he said dismayed, as if that had been a calamity.

She rested her chin on her hand, bringing her amused, inquiring gaze nearer to his. "Then you're not here for fun. You are here for business." This young woman seemed to be growing uncomfortably logical.

"Well, no. What little there is of my father in me got stirring around this latter part of the summer. I couldn't stand it any longer. I think I was spoiling with work."

"So you came for the hunting?"

"Hunting will do. But what I have really come for is for a taste of the irresponsible life."

"Oh, me!" she sighed, "we never have anything else!"

"Then I shall expect you to do great things for me."

"Great things?"

"Yes—shake me up out of my stiffness. Wake me up. Show me—" he hesitated— "all of it!"

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"Of what?"

"The odd hours—sunset, moonrise, whatever time out of the twenty-four you like the best."

A smile curled the corners of her mouth.

"Well, which is it?" he asked, and felt an impulse to reach out and stroke her, she looked so sweet.

"The middle of the night!" she said it very softly, as though she feared the day might overhear her. Her eyes looked dreamy, but did not look away from him. They included him in the dream. He felt himself led far, to the edge of his unasked question—to the edge of the wildest of possibilities.

"You're not afraid?" he asked.

"Of what? The moon?"

"No, of being alone."

"I would rather be alone than with most people."

"And me?" he asked.

She did not answer.

"Take me out into the middle of the night, and drown me in it some time. Bring me out here."

"Why here?" she asked.

"Well, hereabouts—over to the great stone face, perhaps."

Her eyes moved away from him. "Why come so far? Three steps out of the house or seven miles, the feeling is just the same, isn't it?"

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In the cool shade the dusky ivory of her skin looked white and luminous, her eyes blue-black. She was herself a creature of night, of bright lights and velvety shadows, of qualities and textures rather than color and line. It was not the color of her mouth, at best but a pale red, nor even the form, but the expression of it when she smiled which so profoundly disturbed the senses. "I think the feeling would be very different out here," he said positively.

She glanced at him, no longer confidentially, side-long and rather mockingly. "What would the people say to me, running out here in the middle of the night?"

"I thought you had been out here at that hour before?"

"Out here? Never!" She seemed to toss that idea lightly away with the cedar leaves she was tossing down the hill. "Sunset, moonrise, sunrise—those are different. I've come, though mother hated it, since I was quite a little girl. I come out here still once in a while at sunrise, you can't guess what for."

In spite of himself he was aware of a feeling of suspense.

"To watch squirrels play." The mischievous bright face of a child peered through the woman's.

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"You think that is silly, don't you?" she asked, noting his relaxation of interest.

"Very! You can see squirrels play anywhere at any time of day."

"Ah, that shows how little you know about squirrels. They are too busy through the day—they have to work. Sunrise is their party. Over there on the hill opposite, and at the foot of this one there are lots of holes. I sit and see their heads pop out. I see their eyes first, and the next thing they are all up. They are as much fun to watch as rabbits, though they don't skip so high. If I keep perfectly quiet sometimes they come to the edge of the grove."

"And you tame them, I suppose?"

"No!" she scorned him. "I hate tame things. I love them to be wild!"

"Indeed? I thought women liked to coax things to eat from the hand."

She shrugged. "I don't know what most women like, but I know what I like. I tuck myself away behind these trees so they won't know I am here. That is why they come so close. They've never even seen me. I am very careful about that!"

The words struck a chord of memory. He had heard those sentences before, though then they had been spoken by Rader's lips. "It has never even seen her. She has been very careful about that."

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He looked around at the stunted trees, at the hills like tiny mountains with tiny cliffs of stone. His fancy placed the little playing animals. He felt like a man who is looking at the small working model of a great machine. It was all there, Lilliputian size. He waited, for he saw she was going to speak again without his prompting.

"Most people don't know what wild animals are like at all," she said. "They think of them always as hiding or running. When they think of the word 'wild' they think it means afraid. But really it is just the opposite of that. When the creatures are playing with one another, when they are alone and don't suspect any human being, when they are themselves, then you can see what a wild creature really means."

"It means—?" Carron prompted, very cautious, for fear of startling her.

"It means—oh, I don't see how I can put it into words. It means something quick and beautiful and heavenly fearless! There is a strange feeling you have about a creature that has never been touched by a man, and that has forgotten men."

"But there's a difference in degree. You have found that so?"

"Oh, yes. The squirrels, of course, as long as they don't see you, feel perfectly safe. Foxes are

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not so easy. But some are almost impossible to watch without their knowing—the larger animals, the ones that sniff you. Yet, if ever you can, when you can, though it's only for a moment, seeing them is the most wonderful thing in the world. It makes your heart beat. It's like seeing a spirit."

Carron lay for a moment without speaking, studying her face. "Did it never occur to you, when you are looking at such animals, that it would be even more wonderful to catch them?"

"No. I would rather see them killed than caught."

She blushed for the vehemence with which she had spoken.

Carron bit his lip. "My dear young friend, do you think that is quite sensible?"

"No," she said, "I don't. But I don't think it is sensible either to want always to catch things and break them." A word had slipped out that showed too plainly of what she was thinking, what vision was continually before her eyes.

He curbed his tongue. For the world he would not have startled her out of her unconsciousness.

"Men are always shooting things, or taming them, or controlling them," she went on, vivid with argument, "and they always say they do it because it's reasonable. But I don't believe it is reasonableness that makes them do it. It is just a very strong,

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blind sort of feeling. They want to and so they will!"

He kept on smiling for quite a long minute, because he was too irritated to venture speech.

"So, you think I am unreasonable?" he said at last. That had been the thorn which had pricked him so deep.

"Oh, not you!" Her eyes shone upon him all their surprise that he could have made such a stupid blunder. "I only meant men in general. You are—" she hung on the pronouncement of his sentence, then let it fall with intense gravity—"you are different."

Every woman who had known him had probably passed the same sentence on him, but now for the first time he really heard it, and at the touching confidence felt his ears grow hot. His pulse too was perhaps a little warmer. "I broke in my mare myself," he told her warningly.

"You must think me a fanatic. I have never seen a horse broken, and I never will if I can help it; but, of course, horses bred on ranches have to be broken, I suppose. That is rather different."

Carron had a passing vision of the particular shoulder of white desert sand in the lee of which, three years ago, he had roped the frantic, kicking thing which was now the chestnut mare. There

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had been blood in the foam of her nostrils, and he recalled she had nearly succeeded in killing them both; but it had been a great moment and now she was a perfect saddle creature.

"And the wild ones? What would you do with them?"

"Why, let them alone, of course."

His lips opened—remained open, silent, speechless.

"Why not?" she insisted. "Wild horses are the wildest things in the world; they are the only trampling, wild creatures left, and there are such a few of them! If you catch them, tame them, why, then they're gone; but if you leave them and let them go, then you have them for ever!" She flung her hands apart, the palms open with a gesture as free as if they had released liberty itself.

His eyes were on her; but out of the tail of one he had sighted a thing she was unaware of, since it was behind her. A shadow had slid forward from the shelter of the abutting end of a hill and paused, quivering with arrested motion. The horses in the grove fussed. He heard them tugging at their halters, then the shrill whinny of the chestnut mare startled both man and woman.

"Look there!" Carron said. He indicated the shadow. He had startled the girl, but, strangely

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enough, she did not look. Shrinking, drawing in her arms close to her body, she stared straight at him, for a moment; then made a rapid start as if she would have flung herself forward upon him. He had a feeling that she meant to cover his eyes. He caught her by one wrist and, with his hand against her cheek, gently forced her head around in the direction of his pointing.

The body that had cast the shadow stood there, plain in view, a small, blackish horse, with head flung up, staring upon them. As her eyes took it in she gave a quick little sigh, catching in her throat, and he felt her tense muscles relax.

"Oh," she said, and again, "Oh! I thought—I thought it was—"

"Well, what did you think it was?" he demanded.

"Oh, a lion, a tiger, an elephant!" She began to shake with helpless laughter. Hysteria was the note in it. "You looked so frightened!" she gasped.

Carron's pulses indeed were going fifty to the minute. "You frightened me," he declared.

The black horse was surveying them, nostrils quivering with suspicion. All at once he wheeled and galloped across the open space, and with a graceful, sailing motion vanished through another overlapping fold of hills.

It was a spirited sight. The animal was more

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than usually well made; but Blanche Rader's glance followed it almost with indifference. "I have never seen him before," she observed. "I wonder who owns him."

"Perhaps he is one of those fellows we've been talking about?" Carron tested her.

"Never!" Her full glance scorned his ignorance. "Didn't you see—he stood and looked at us. And then, when he ran, he wasn't terrified and he is too small! Oh, he's nothing like, he isn't the same thing!" She looked at Carron doubtfully. "I begin to believe you have never seen a wild horse!"

CHAPTER VII

UPON A CARPET

CARRON came bursting in on the peaceful scholar, who, upon his knees, was searching in one of his lowest book-shelves. The young man was hot from his ride, and excited. He had left the door aswing behind him and the sweet odor of pines had followed him. "She wants it let alone!" he almost shouted the words.

Rader looked up, his large blue handkerchief that he had been using as a duster grasped in one hand. "Who? What?" he murmured. He seemed taken aback at seeing Carron so exasperated, looming so directly above him.

"Your daughter! the horse! that's what she wants of it—and that's all."

The quickness with which Rader took his meaning suggested that his mind had been dwelling on the same subject. Perhaps, between readings and writings that morning, he had recalled the yesterday's talk and had speculated upon Carron's luck. He was as alert as if the subject had scarcely been dropped between them.

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"Did she tell you that?" he asked.

"Didn't she, though! That, and a lot more!" The long-pent irritation broke forth. "Oh, she gave me her ideas, she didn't leave me a doubt on the matter! Said she would rather see it killed than caught; that breaking horses was not a sensible occupation; that if you tamed a wild horse, you lost it, but that if you never went near it you had it for ever."

The scholar, drawn straight up on his knees, with his handkerchief in one hand and a tobacco jar in the other, had the air of an astonished suppliant. "I don't understand *that*," he said slowly.

"Of course you don't! It's the most infernal nonsense! A horse is no use until it's broken. That's sense, isn't it? Says that it's not—just an instinct that makes you feel that way, a great blind feeling, she calls it. A feeling—pshaw!"

It was evident Carron had one now. He rushed about the little study at the risk of upsetting chairs, and the scholar himself. "Doesn't want to have anything hurt, of course, can't bear to see anything suffer! To hear her you'd think the worst thing in the world was to scare a wild animal; and as for hurting it a little—! If she had seen men agonize as I have she wouldn't worry so much about a wild horse!"

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Rader got up, set the tobacco jar on the table. "And won't she tell you where she saw it?"

"Tell! What do you think? She's got a will, that girl of yours!" He was teaching Rader about his daughter. "She would no more tell—" He tipped his head back, half closing his eyes, recalling her face under the shadow of the black cedars—"than if it were the sacred ibis and she its priest. Oh, I don't doubt she has seen something remarkable. I can believe that now. I can understand how she'd be jealous to keep it, if she wanted it for anything. To use it—but, man, that's the devil of it, she doesn't."

"The Ideal," Rader said gently. He looked down. "Something that has never suffered and does not need to—something apart, unlike humanity." He addressed himself more directly to Carron, "I suppose there are no women in the world like the Venus of Melos, but we don't want to mar her because of that, do we?"

Carron brooded sulkily. "Yes, I can see the Ideal, fast enough; but your comparison is not true. The Venus of Melos is not a real woman."

"Isn't she?" The scholar thoughtfully rubbed the back of his hand against his long chin. "Do you know, to me, she has always been the most real one in the world."

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"You do beat— Well," suddenly breaking off, "make it a hypothetical case. Suppose we call her a real woman, the living Ideal, is that an argument for leaving her alone or for wanting her—eh?"

The scholar smiled. "Oh, no doubt, no doubt," he said, as if to his notion the alternative were clear enough. "Did you tell Blanche that?"

Carron was shocked. "You can't talk like that to a woman!"

"Why not? The desire to capture—it's natural—it's in the blood. Why didn't you show her your side of the business? It would have been only fair to her, considering all she has told you. Besides, you might have persuaded her."

Carron was silent. Rader's idea of what had taken place between the girl and himself in their morning's interview was naïve certainly—straight question and reply, having the whole thing plainly out, as flat as you please. It was the idea he had started with himself that morning; but, somehow, circumstances had altered the original conception. He could not tell whether he was wholly responsible, or whether Blanche had had a hand in it. He knew he had questioned, listened to her replies, not contradicted, perhaps; though he could not remember he had agreed with her. His diplomacy had been aimed at not startling her out of her self-

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revelation; and then she had turned on him and transfixed him with her judgment. "You are different." Where had she got that idea?

"I don't like the way you seemed not to tell her anything," Rader said, a little wistfully. "You are very clever at it, my boy."

"If you like, you can tell her everything."

The color flamed under the scholar's thin skin. "You need have no fear of that. All I want is to keep completely out of this business. I have had nothing to do with it and I don't want to have."

It was on the tip of Carron's angry tongue to say that the scholar had had everything to do with it, whether he had intended to or not; but he shut his teeth in front of the unruly member. "I beg your pardon, I have been boring you with my affairs."

"Not a bit," the other protested hastily. "In fact, I've been very much interested—" He broke off, conscious, evidently, of an inconsistency between this remark and the one before it. "What I mean," he stated carefully and explicitly, "is that I can't help you with what you're trying to do. Your story I enjoyed very much. Your Son of the Wind was delightful—very like—yes, very like one of the eclogues. Anything else you may have to tell? . . ." He paused inquiringly.

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"As soon as there is anything more, I will let you know," Carron said. He was relieved that Rader's interest had not waned—far from that! The old fellow, in his eagerness to keep hold of their subject of discussion, had actually given it a shove forward. He had put it on an abstract basis. In the future, Carron saw, it was going to be easier for them to talk about; and talk was all that he expected or wanted of Rader. Talk—the talk both of the father and the daughter—was what had revealed to him all the facts he had learned since he had been in this house; talk, sounding like the merest delicate theorizing, fancies floating in the air! Yet now he began to see that this had its origin in a fact, and that every visionary phrase harked back to as fine an actuality as Carron cared to put a bridle on.

How the girl, unaware, had revealed to him the reality and splendor of the creature! No waif of the range, but Son of the Wind himself—or kin to him! Her words, her looks, her gestures had translated how well she knew the difference. Then, just at the point when Carron's expectation stood tiptoe, she had slipped away from him; recoiled when he thought she was coming forward, dodged the subject, eluded it, fled from it! Not startled by any word of his, but by her own; suddenly realizing how this veiled talk of hers had been on the edge

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of her darling secret. No amount of circumnavigation through disarming topics could lead her back to talk of her squirrels, her foxes, her wanderings at odd hours among the hills. All the way home she had not spoken a serious word. She had left him at the veranda steps, and gone into the house laughing.

He was far from supposing Blanche Rader to be an absolute obstacle, as, in the heat of vexation, he had represented her to Rader. But to come at her by indirection would occupy time. As for coming at her plainly as to a man, stating his object and his convictions, trying to "persuade" her as Rader put it—Carron smiled. He was not going into an argument with a woman while there was any other means of pursuing his object. In his crowded life he had had little time for experience of women, but what had been his had been acute. Certain discoveries had stuck in his mind, one, what that thing called argument amounted to, when it was between a man and a woman; the pitting of logic against will, of expostulation against infinite iteration, of a dogged clinging to one's own level-headedness against every attraction and aggravation the unfair half of man can summon. He gave this girl the credit of being unaware of her provocativeness. She could not help it, but there she was! Talking with her, he had to

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look at her, listen to her. A blue eye might blunt the edge of logic, and resolution be seduced by the bend of a waist. Even now, as he walked down the long passageway connecting the study with the house, hearing her voice calling to her mother, he loitered to listen. The timber of it was like singing. No, he wanted to keep out of that blind path where mind and sense were mixed together. Stick to business and deal with men! Thus he spoke to himself, and with this resolution in his head found himself involved with a household of women.

He had returned to find all the heavy batteries of house-cleaning unmasked. It seemed natural that the scholar should shut himself in with the peace of his books, while the upheaval in the hotel went forward. He would have been helpless in such an emergency; and when he did venture out, summoned to lunch, he moved a dismayed spirit, and became involved in the furniture, armies of which occupied the halls. But Carron was born for the handling of objects, animate or inanimate. In the first days of his arrival, while operations had been limited to the polite business of sweeping, he had kept his distance, but it was impossible to remain aloof when two women were struggling with ladders and hammers. He passed from a morning under open skies in the pursuance of his own business to an at-

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mosphere of turmoil beside which the occupation of a city appeared a trivial matter. Mrs. Rader was most unanxious to accept his service. She had received his first offers of assistance almost with horror.

In her faded gown and her large dingy apron, her face grayed with dust, she looked at him as if he were exclusively an ornament, and at best a suspicious ornament. Even after he had vindicated himself with the putting up of the closet shelves, even while he was renewing the fastenings of the hall windows, and doing it well, she still surveyed him with the eyes of a skeptic watching a miracle.

It came to him that she was less skeptical of his skill than his kindness. The idea that she could doubt that astonished him. Here he was laboring like Hercules at the distaff! Did the woman suppose he had a dark, double motive in handling her tools for her and driving in nails? Perhaps she was only unaccustomed to being helped. He noticed she offered her directions timidly; different indeed from that other one who appeared to have no doubts of herself. He was amused to watch how the two women worked together. Evidently they understood each other to the flicker of an eyelash. Mrs. Rader knew whether the windows were clean and the woodwork needed washing, but Blanche saw

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that the blue rugs went into the room with the blue furniture, that the mirrors were in the right light, that the curtains were even. She was as ready to blacken her hands and dive into dusty closets as Mrs. Rader, but the faculty for arrangement of effect was stronger in her. She did it better. She accepted Carron's help with a promptitude and ordered him about with a grace that commended itself. Yet she waited upon him too, at moments; she brought him his implements. She watched him.

He became to both women a person to be appealed to, called to from a distance, and by one of them commanded on the instant. He grew used to seeing the girl's face with perhaps a smut on the lovely arch of her forehead, peering over the banister to him appealing a fresh difficulty. It might have been his house and his opinion the most valued one in it. He was carpenter and maid in one. Standing aloft, invoking the devils of dizziness, he swept cobwebs from high ceilings. He moved monumental masses of walnut; he drew endless tacks; and in his arms the carpet of fabulous flowers made its exit from the drawing-room and was hung in the sun. A pillar of dust stood out around it and in the core of this, like a genius of blows, Carron wrought, tireless.

"What in the world do you do, when I am not here?" he demanded egotistically, as Blanche, com-

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ing out with a lesser piece of carpet, paused within the smoke of his labor. She had changed her riding things to a blouse of white cotton stuff, and a skirt, striped red and white, like a market girl's.

"We hang them out overnight," she said, "and in the morning Bert Ferrier gives them a beating, but nothing like this!"

Carron lifted one eyebrow. That accomplishment was all that remained to him of a scar which had brought him near death. "So, I am standing in his shoes?"

"O, no, indeed; they would be much too small for you."

He looked hard at her. Had she intended that double meaning? "I would much rather have my own in any case," he declared. "They are better made. What do you want done with this?" And he took what she was carrying from her.

Together they spread it on the ground, at a little distance from the house, just upon the edge of the pines. They had handled a great many things together that afternoon, from the shellac for the dining-room floor to those marble statuettes, probably another relic of "Janfer's Folly," which startled out from niches in the wall, like miniature ghosts. They had seen each other repeatedly—taken instructions and given them. They had almost quarreled over the

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right tone for the floor stain. Evidences of character had expressed themselves in actions as well as in words. Now, with the cessation of the turmoil, near the end of the day they paused. It seemed to him that he had come to know her with astonishing rapidity. She had grown from a strange to a familiar mystery—but mysterious still. Standing upon the carpet she extended her arms above her head, stretching her body in a luxury of weariness. The naturalness and unconsciousness of the gesture, the way she abandoned herself to it, relaxed to the finger-tips, was alarmingly beautiful. “Well, Baddoura, where does the magic carpet take us now?” he asked. “The city of Bagdad, or the enchanted gardens?”

She looked inquiringly. “I wish I knew what you were talking about.”

“It is all written in a book of Mr. Rader’s called the Arabian Nights. Prince What-You-Call-Him had a magic carpet that took him to various extraordinary enchantments, as this one at present is threatening to transport me.” He spoke, a little ironical, of his own feeling.

She looked sidelong at the trees. This time he thought she understood. “I wish it would float me over to the kitchen, and, after dinner, up into my own room,” she remarked. “I would like to sit



“Where does the magic carpet take you now?”

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here a few minutes longer and see if the magic will work."

"Why not? It is early, only five o'clock."

"Yes, but to-night we have dinner early. It is whist night, and Bert Ferrier comes up in the evening to play."

That name helped to bring him back to his senses.

"Oh," he said. He stood stiffly, wondering whether these two were engaged.

She made a step by which she worked herself a few inches nearer to where he stood. "Promise me something," she asked, tipping her head over to look directly into his face, "you won't go off up-stairs and leave me to get through with it alone? I am so tired, it seems to me if I have to play whist all the evening with Bert, I shall die! You will stay down and play too, and help me out?"

Carron had no wish to avoid Ferrier. He had, on the contrary, the greatest interest to see him. The girl had mistaken the change in his expression at mention of the fellow's name, and he was not unwilling to make capital of her mistake.

"I'll tell you," he bargained, "I will if we can be partners."

"Oh, why not? Of course we can." The idea was far from seeming impossible to her. She swung around with a little pirouette. Under serious

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pinetrees the carpet displayed large and extraordinarily pink roses at least two feet apart. "The joy of mother's heart," Blanche explained, and began to make little dancing steps from one to another. These assumed rhythm—then measure, the figure of a dance; and Carron joined it. One-two-three to the left, one-two-three to the right, forward, back, cross over—then ignoring the precedent of always stepping on flowers, he whirled her. She was light, but not diaphanous. They trod a wild measure, quicksilver in her heels, the elixir of youth or something keener in his spirits. Her breath was quick and warm upon his cheek and beneath their feet their shadows, mixed in one, darted like imps.

Quicker, wilder, until the fabric they danced on glimmered beneath their eyes a ground of veritable flowers. They sensed the approaching end. They spun like dervishes. The moment had come, when, with any girl the play would have ended naturally, with a kiss on a flushed cheek; but here was not "any girl," and his impulse was of no middle quality. With a turn of the wrist he whirled them apart. Circling still to keep balance, they swung to opposite ends of the carpet. His action, so far from anything foreshadowed, must have taken the girl by surprise—by more than surprise, perhaps, but she did not show it. She caught step, curtsied

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deeply, making of this last impromptu, a figure in the dance, and panting, pressing her hand to her side, poised, looking at him. It seemed to him that everything he felt was written staring plain upon his face. A glance was all she gave. It seemed to decide her. "I have to go; I hear mother starting dinner."

"What shall I do with the carpet?" he called after her, and in his ears his voice sounded hoarse.

He had no desire to stop her, now while his veins were on fire and his flesh felt heavy, like lead.

"Leave it till to-morrow, leave it in the sun," she chanted back at him as she flitted. She went off in the direction of the house buoyantly, as though the prospect of an evening of whist, far from tiring her, had abated her weariness.

But Carron felt by no means happy. He stood there in the sun while the wild riot of the senses passed from him, leaving him with the uneasy feeling of having wasted his time. Not that his afternoon's work had interfered with anything definite he could have done in his own affair, but that the impetus he had had for following his discovery of the morning seemed to have been halted. He had not had his own thoughts to himself. He feared he could scarcely have them to himself this evening. She had a way of absorbing a man—no, of making

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him be absorbed. He should have had his wits about him. He should have protested that he would appear only if he could be the idle member of the company. Then he could have watched Ferrier without being himself watched. He could have got a perspective on him. But the girl's plea had been so pretty! He had been flattered into making that stipulation, about their being partners. Now the suspicion pulled him that she had managed this deliberately. Probably she wanted some one to play off against Ferrier. She had seemed to care not a pin for the fellow. The one time he had seen them together she had seemed to hate him, and this afternoon she had expressed the greatest indifference in her mention of the fellow's name. Yet who could be sure, with women?

Later, at dinner, his suspicion grew. She appeared illuminated. Talked animatedly, ate little, and evidently had her mind fixed on certain arrangements of which she spoke to her mother in lowered voice. Immediately afterward began her flittings in and out of the living-room, skirmishes with the furniture there, arranging of curtains, or smoothing out of rugs—the behavior of any woman with a “party” on her hands, serious and intense as if a few people coming to sit on chairs was an event of the universe.

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In this bustle, which did not include him, Carron wandered rather forlorn, catching now and then a glimpse of Blanche or Mrs. Rader, more often getting fragments of murmured discussions. "Why don't you have the lamp, as you always do?" Or "You always used the center-table before!" Then in a note of exasperation, "My dear Blanche, on a night like this, what do you want of a fire!"

"It looks so pretty, and we can have the windows open if it is too hot."

Her voice had answered, from aloft, on the little stair which she was ascending, probably on her way to dress, and Mrs. Rader's had called from within the living-room. Entering he found her there alone. It was the room Blanche had been sweeping that morning, in the golden vapor of dust, but now it had become a place of low-set lights and long, pointed, radiating shadows. Thus the ceiling, which he recalled as hideously papered and the settees and what-nots around the wall were lost in a fringe of darkness. What one saw most clearly was the polished top of the card table, illuminated by its cluster of candles; the chairs drawn around it, the fireplace with its glow and in all the windows reflections of little pointed flames.

Mrs. Rader stood looking at these things, wistful and astonished. She seemed to doubt them, to ad-

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mire them, to think that they would scarcely do, and Carron's suggestion that the arrangement would promote conversation only turned her eyes upon him with the same expression, as if he had been the most important effect in the room, therefore a little more alien than the rest. What in the world did Mrs. Rader think of him? Wasn't she making some mistake about him? Wasn't he an innocent, harmless sort of person—though at the moment a most uncomfortable one? He was in fact an interloping boarder who should not have appeared in this gathering of a family and its friend; but he was presently more amused than uncomfortable at Mrs. Rader's manner of waiting and listening. He wondered whether it was Ferrier or her daughter she was so nervously expecting; but when they entered he could not tell. They entered simultaneously, Ferrier with Rader from the veranda, Blanche through the inner door.

She came in with the air of conscious triumph of women when they feel they have succeeded, either with themselves or with those mysterious manipulations of things which they carry on beneath the surface of events. She wore a dress, charming for what it showed her to be. The soft flow of the old, washed stuff conformed graciously to the lines of

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her body, and the beauties he had glimpsed and guessed at before, the sloping line of the neck and shoulder, and the long, lovely forms of the arms were uncovered. These and the way she carried her head, the brightness of her eyes, the look she had of rejoicing at being alive, made her shine in her candle-lighted, fire-lighted room.

"Well, what's happened?" Rader wanted to know, blinking at the dance of shadows around him. "Hermione, what have you done to us?"

"I haven't. It is Blanche's doing." Mrs. Rader looked down. Carron perceived that she understood the reason of her daughter's transformation scene and was trying to hide it in her eyes, but the two men who had just come in evidently found it an astonishment.

"Very pretty," the scholar determined, looking at his daughter.

"Rather dark, isn't it?" Ferrier inquired. His eyes, black and quick-moving as the little points of shadow, had been darting here and there, trying to discover the unessential that was meant to be hidden. "I suppose we will have the lamp when we begin to play?" He addressed Blanche directly, as if there was no one to be considered besides the two of them.

She sent a smiling look at Carron. "There's

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plenty of light to see the cards and one another's faces, and that is all we need to see," she said, giving Ferrier her hand.

He took it with an eagerness that was not hidden by his air of the would-be critic. He appeared a sallow, dark, slim young man, rather pretty, trimly built and buttoned into black, his look of lightness and alertness marred by the slight inward bend of the knees. Altogether a facile figure, smooth and easy and but for the small, hawk-like nose, mild enough in appearance—a very different figure from the man on the road, a different figure, even, from the man on the drive. Could he have forgotten it all so quickly? His manner was that of an old friend of the family. Even his uneasiness at the change about him seemed a part of that familiarity.

"Mr. Rader," he asked, "would you like a chair by the fire?"

"For some reason," the scholar explained, "my daughter has asked me to take a hand."

"Oh," said Ferrier blankly, and for the first time he looked at Carron.

"Mr. Carron—Mr. Ferrier," Blanche said. The fact that they had met before had evidently slipped her mind in some greater absorption, and neither one or the other found words to remind her of it. They shook hands. Ferrier's was limp. Carron felt

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rather dazed when he thought of how naturally they had encountered first, how plainly they had discussed the facts of their greatest interest. They had seen each other angry, drunk; they had parted familiar antagonists; and here the woman had raised up the social barrier between them, making them strangers.

"You are to sit here, father, and, Bert, you opposite," she said. So calmly she disposed of men, like fate! Ferrier gave her another mute glance. He looked as if he were about to assert some right that had been his, but then he yielded and took the place appointed him.

The four sat down together, four fronting one another in a hollow square, for two hours to look only from the faces of the cards to one another's face. Only people on very good terms, or the merest strangers, can face one another in such fashion and be at ease. Even Rader, though he lifted his gaze in his usual slow, direct fashion, did so with an effort and with a shy consciousness. Ferrier's manner was lively, and between games, in the pause, his talk flowed in a thin stream. His eyes moved constantly, darting at every person, every object in the room, resting nowhere an instant; flitting over Carron's face, skimming him with glances that feared to stop; that seemed to refute, to deny, with

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every fresh excursion to repeat, "I don't know you; I don't see you; you are not there!"

He had not forgotten. It was not likely that he could have forgotten. That ugly little moment on the drive was too hard to down. It kept rising in Carron's own mind, like an unexorcised ghost. He could fancy of what Ferrier was thinking; the same thing he was thinking of, Rader too, in his greater detachment, of the curious secret which was common among them, which made it hard for them to look at one another.

To tell of what the women were thinking was a far different matter. There was no telling. Yet, they, too, seemed to have a secret. Without looking at each other, rather ignoring each other, some understanding was between them. Mrs. Rader, silent in her corner, watched Blanche Rader at the card table, bright with the mysterious elation that cards could never account for, nor candles, nor wood-fire. They were a background, and a background for mere enjoyment. In arranging the things and drawing people around the table she seemed to have accomplished her ambition. She looked at Ferrier and she smiled at him, but rather less than she looked and smiled at her father. Carron could not feel sure in what way she looked and smiled at himself. He had too keen a sense of her appearance, and his

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mind was distracted trying to discover why she was beautiful. He watched the movement of her arms and hands against the dark surface of the table, while her fingers let through the red and white and black stream of the cards; questioned her eyes, which laughed; the intonation of her voice when she spoke. The matter was past finding out. The explanation might lurk beyond visible things, in the heart of her mood. And there was a veil between her mood and theirs. At moments she seemed to draw him near it, but then the faces of the others would divide his thought. They were sitting among other people, looking at clubs and spades, handling hearts, hearing behind them the beating of insects against the window screens. If only they had been dancing upon a carpet!

CHAPTER VIII

THE WINDOW OF THE SPHINX

AT half-past eleven the evening was over and Ferrier getting into his overcoat. The pocket hung heavy with something. He drew it out with an embarrassed smile. "I forgot to give you the letters," he said, and handed them to Blanche.

"Thank you. I never thought to ask for them." She took them carelessly, standing in the open door a moment after Ferrier had gone, looking out with Carron into the gray glimmer of the half-moon. He wanted to ask her to come out three steps from the house and show him what that flood-tide of night that she had spoken of might be like; but then Mr. Rader interrupted him on the verge of it, asking if there were any letters for him.

"Oh, I forgot!" She hastily skimmed the package. "Congressional Library at Washington, that's yours—and this is mine. There you are, 'Pratt's Second-Hand Book Store'—and this is mine—and mine—and here's one for Mr. Carron!" Her voice showed a little surprise. She held it out to him.

He saw his foreman's writing on the envelope.

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There was no mistaking that wild, irregular succession of angles and loops. "Pardon me, Mrs. Rader. I am blocking the door and I see you want to lock it."

He moved back, and Blanche moved back perforce. Her mother gave him a grateful look, but it was not Mrs. Rader's gratitude he was seeking, but the quickest way out of the room. He made his excuses, aware that they must seem abrupt; but a premonition was upon him, sharper than ever, that he had been wasting time, and that from this moment on it would be scant for him. He stopped in the hall, where a lamp had been set high in a bracket, and held the sheet of paper up.

It was dated two days back. The stuff had been sent that day, Morgan wrote, and "Esmeralda Charley" was going down by the morning train to Beckwith to await orders. He hoped the horse was the one Carron thought it was or it wouldn't be worth the trouble. Just as Morgan had said all along the brown stallion of the new bunch had a blind eye, and was dead financial loss; and that half-breed "buster" whom Carron had thought so fine, had killed the two best mares—entirely unnecessary—and would Carron discharge him by wire, as he wouldn't take another discharge and hung around, drunk, every night. And how about the consign-

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ment for the Cincinnati Horse Market? The Cincinnati people swore that it was not up to standard, and they were the ugliest crowd to deal with Morgan had ever seen!

Carron ground his teeth, and consigned Morgan to wretched places. "Damned, pig-headed Welshman! One week more and he'll think he owns the business! He needs me sitting on his neck every minute!" The jar of the business, the tangle and the clatter of it were back upon him with that letter. He realized again dust and plains, and hard work, the eternal drive against time and the importance of it. Morgan and the boys had been "driving," and getting inevitably tangled, while he had rushed off on this wild-goose chase. For what? For nothing but to indulge himself, his fancy for one horse. One horse! True, still if it were the greatest in the world? But that he did not know. He did not know one actual fact. He had not pressed the business, nor pushed it through. He had been mooning among leaves with a girl, filling his head with fancies like a girl, dawdling, blowing hot and cold—and Esmeralda Charley sitting in Beckwith awaiting orders!

He put the letter into his pocket and ran up-stairs. Entering his room, he groped his way across it, lit the lamp and looked at his watch. Fifteen minutes.

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His ideas seemed born with the procedure of his actions.

His light was a blind to make the Raders believe him still in his room; his room itself was but a route by which he passed to the door of the outside stair. He went softly down. As he reached the foot of it, he saw the light in the living-room was out. He kept as close as he could to the wall, making a detour by the back of the house, and was startled, hurrying up into the pines, to feel the flowered carpet beneath his feet. The edge of it all but tripped him. He shuffled over it, hardly realizing what it was, passed the scholar's study and then, beyond sight of windows, began to run downward. The moon gave him a half shut eye that helped him through the trees, but running at night through a wood, and running of necessity without sound, was no easy business. With his arms now flung up to protect his face, now out to feel where the trees came, expecting each moment a branch to knock the breath out of him, or a sharp edge of rock to catch his foot, his instinct for direction stood him in good stead, carrying him straight in a long, slanting cross-cut for the edge of the road.

He came out upon it, at least halfway down the hill. His chest still labored with rapid breathing, but he struggled to make it slower, shaking pine

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needles out of his hair, gathering himself together for nonchalance. He had measured time to a nicety. On the dirt road above, he heard the dead, muffled sound of steps. A few moments and the figure of Ferrier came into sight. He was walking quickly, his hands driven into his pockets and his head down. As he came on his face became clear in the half light, eyes lowered, lips moving rapidly, as if he rehearsed words.

Carron very leisurely sauntered up toward him. "Good evening again," he said and was sorry to have frightened him. Ferrier halted as if he thought he was seeing an apparition, the man he had but lately left in the house, now walking up to meet him.

"I happened to remember something I wanted to ask you," Carron explained. The words sounded unhappily impertinently flippant; but the man he addressed showed no inclination either to laugh or to knock him down. His look glided sidewise. He seemed to meditate a bolt through the trees; then, drawing his elbows closer to his body, he slipped past Carron and walked on without speaking.

"I beg your pardon," Carron said mildly, catching step with him, "I would like to explain that it is a civil question." To talk while he could see only

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a profile, and both hurrying so that their breath came short, was impossible. "There will be no harm in waiting a moment," he said and took his companion by the arm. He half expected resistance, but Ferrier stopped. He stood holding himself stiffly, as if expecting a blow. Carron waited. Ferrier looked upon the ground, then at the woods, then upward at the bright face of the sky, finally, sullenly, to his adversary's face. "I wanted to ask you," the horse-breaker said, "if you ever went hunting?"

"I don't think I have the time." Ferrier was trying to resume his air of a young gentleman in society, but it was a failure.

"Because I am going to-morrow," Carron went on, as though the other had not spoken, "and I should like to have you go along."

"No, I can't."

"You'd better," Carron urged. "I am a stranger here. I don't know the country, and you would be doing me a service."

"I am not going to do any more services for you!" Ferrier squared himself obstinately. "You've got all you're going to get out of me."

Defiance was declared between; Carron was glad the battle was to be in the open. It would be sooner

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ended. "You promised me a good deal more than that, you know," he said.

"I know, but I didn't mean to tell you anything. I didn't know what I was saying or doing. I—I—was hard up!" he gulped.

"Yes," Carron said, and kept his hand on the man's arm soothingly, as he would upon the halter of a nervous horse. "But you did, you see, and you might as well go along now and tell me the rest of it."

"I won't have anything more to do with you, I tell you!" Ferrier answered excitedly. "Look here, didn't I set you on the trail all right? Didn't I tell you where to go and who knew about—"

Carron interrupted. "I know, you told me the story. You described the horse; you said you had seen it; you made a bargain with me and fulfilled only a part of it; and I am here waiting for you to complete it."

Ferrier stared. "Why, but I sent you here because she—"

"Understand me," Carron said distinctly, "this is a matter of business between you and me. I know of no one who has this information except yourself. Beside us there is no one else concerned in it."

"Yes, there is," Ferrier burst out, "and we both

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know it! She is! You come to me and you pretend it's because you don't want to deal with her—Oh, no! you've got too fine a sense of honor! You want to leave her out of it? Why, my God," his voice soared, "she won't tell you! Don't I know? Do you think I'd ever have given her away if I had thought you could fool her into it? But you can't! And now, do you think I'm going to risk telling you myself, and risk her turning me down? Yes,—wouldn't she, though! She'd throw me over, like a sack of old meal, if I told about that infernal horse! But I'm not going to give her the chance! I'll play second fiddle until it's gone. Won't be much longer till the rains—and then you'll see!"

Carron had involuntarily loosed hold of him and Ferrier was backing away, down the road, step by step, his voice rising as he retreated. "And you needn't think because she was so pleasant and made so much of you this evening, that it means a thing. She's that way with every one. She doesn't care a flip of her finger about you! Hang around, and ask as much as you like. You'll see!" He turned and began to run.

For a moment Carron entertained the idea of following him and shaking the breath out of him. He wasn't worth while knocking down! Dragging forward the woman into the business, shouting out

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her name! Who had supposed she had given Carron a thought? Who had supposed she cared a flip of her finger? His face was hot in the chilly moonlight. But then the cooler reflection followed, the poor devil was in love with her himself—and jealous. That tirade he had poured out had been the ecstasy of jealousy; proprietorship, trying to assert itself. But there was more than that in it. There was something strange and contradictory. “If he didn’t want me to get the horse,” Carron reflected, “why the devil did he give me the right direction in the first place! Why, if he loves her and is afraid of her, why didn’t he lie, up and down, to me; lead me astray? He’d have had the twenty dollars just as surely.” He slapped his thigh. “But he *did* want me to get the horse! He did, in the first place. It’s his stumbling block. He hoped I would get it out of his way, so she would remember him long enough to look at him.” Carron apostrophized the moon. “Now he’s got remorse; scared! Afraid she’ll hear about his part in it; afraid, if I get the horse, the whole thing will come out!” He shook his head. He relinquished the idea of following the fugitive, and at the same time relinquished the idea of Ferrier altogether. “He won’t do,” he meditated, “he’s too weak.”

The weaknesses of strong men who know what

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they want and will pursue any means to get it, were always sharp, certain instruments in the hands of whoever cared to use them, but the weakness of this man, who reflected the will of the last person he had talked with might cut in none knew what direction. He had sold the girl's confidence for twenty dollars. He had fallen into an ecstasy of dread of the consequences. Yet even thus, and under her very eye, he had not had the moral courage to resist that gold piece. Carron reflected, walking back through moon and shade, that a man did not need to have a very delicate honor to want not to deal with Ferrier. He did not plead a delicate honor for himself; Carron only pleaded the courage of his desires. He was ready for anything that would find him the much desired, fleet and elusive Son of the Wind. Had he met, there and then, the traveler with the cloven foot who stops men in forest ways and offers them the world for their name written in red, he would have been inclined to sign the document. But the devil within was the only one who had ever appeared to Carron, to offer him assistance, and this one was his demon of persistence.

He was up the next day at dawn to be sure of being out of the house before the Rader family were stirring; but it was necessary to intrude in Mrs. Rader's kitchen, previous to trying twenty miles on

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horseback, and he was still looking helplessly at an array of jars, all different in label and contents, none of which seemed to be either tea or bread, when the door opened and Blanche Rader entered.

He was exasperated. Had he not known how it would be! A woman was always cutting across your trail, not for any interest in you, just for perversity, or to know what was going on. She gave herself away with her first words.

"I was awake early this morning and heard you stirring. I thought perhaps you meant to get an early start." At least she did not ask him where he was going. She began to move deliberately about, lit the little oil stove, took a can from the shelf, a coffee pot, and set some bread to toast. The kitchen was filled with the searing and steaming of things cooking. She looked pale and languid, and had less the appearance of a person who is hardly awake than of one who has not slept enough. Her hair drawn up and held closely with a large bow of red ribbon showed the full white sweep of the neck at the back. Her head was carried a little on one side as if wearily. She set out his breakfast on the kitchen table, but set it very prettily, and while the toast was finishing, arranged a bouquet of dwarf chrysanthemums in a vase. Ferrier's words returned hatefully to his mind. Was Blanche Rader "that way with

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every one?" He preferred to think that only for him had she ever arranged a little bunch of flowers. She sat down with him at the table, and made him uneasy, not eating, but leaning her chin on her hands, keeping her large eyelids persistently down, drawing patterns on the cloth with her forefinger. He ate hastily, for he sensed a question in the wind. He did not escape it. "Are you going to be gone—?" she came to a stop, seemed unable to get another word out of her throat.

"All day."

"Oh!" Her eyes came up with a flash. "Are you coming back?"

"Why, of course. Did you think—"

Her lips parted, growing a little more rosy. "I thought you had had bad news last night, that had called you away." Bad news, indeed, he thought, but of a sort to make him stick the tighter. She was blushing faintly. "I wouldn't have come down—I mean I wouldn't have asked you—" She laughed at her own embarrassment. "I didn't mean to be so inquisitive."

"All women are," Carron declared rising.

She bit her lip. "All women are different."

"Some are exceptional. It was very kind of you to get up at such an hour, and that was a very good breakfast." He gathered up his guns and his hat

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and stepped out upon the side veranda. He thought she had taken her dismissal. He had a notion there was a flutter of red and white petticoat behind him as he went down the wagon track, and thought it was because that red and white was somehow getting fixed in his stubborn fancy; but when he reached the stable, he saw she was indeed still with him.

"I only wanted to say," she explained, evidently because his rather grim expression suggested that she needed an explanation, "that you would better take my pony. He is used to the rocks. Nothing can hurt him or lose him in the mountains. He knows all the trails."

She was more thoughtful of him certainly than other women he had known, and not at all insistent upon her own presence. She stood in silence during the more exacting preliminaries of saddling. Then, as he began shortening stirrups, she spoke. "When you get back to-night, if you care to and are not too tired, I will take you over to the largest pine, 'The Witch's Spindle' and show you what I mean by the high tide of night."

The same thought had been in his mind the evening before, had been upon his lips when the letters interrupted him. Now he had forgotten about it. In his mind he was writing a telegram. "I shall be

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delighted," he said, while his eye measured the leathers.

She did not speak again, and before he looked up he heard her walking out through the old barn in a cloud of little echoes; but when he rode up the drive a few minutes later he saw her just at the edge of the pines, standing on the carpet which still lay spread out on the ground. She looked toward him and waved her hand. The cool sunrise wind fluttered the red ribbon in her hair. Carron remembered her quite too long after he had lost sight of her. The road he followed had memories of a flying figure letting herself be run away with for the joy of wildness. It led him up and down the swells of land rising to the crest of the watershed. He did not leave that thought quite behind until he had passed through the village of hills and was fairly out in the long dull level valley with Beckwith in sight.

The day was early still when he got in, but his business in this place was trying and various, first to discover Esmeralda Charley, whom he found in a desperate little half-breed hotel. Here he spent the best of an hour, carefully fishing out of the fellow's mind such ideas as he had on certain matters at the ranch. What he found out was more cheering than he had expected. Sanguine himself, he always forgot

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that Morgan was a blue devil. He decided to wire the foreman to keep the new "buster," and modified some of the expressions in his letter before he took it to the post-office. There remained his stuff to look after. Safer not to appear himself in connection with that heap of stakes, ropes and canvas, for he knew the curiosity of a village, how fast it can travel and how far. He sent Esmeralda Charley on the errand, and waited in the wretched bar, fretted with the false position of secrecy in which he found himself. His actions were those of a thief, though he was not taking property which belonged to another, or to any one in fact. But the girl held the whip-hand over them all, her father, through his loyalty, a little weak in point of practice, but theoretically sincere enough; the man on the road, through his fear of losing her, and Carron through his fear of losing the horse. Woman she might be, and fanciful, but he had had some experience in the strength of woman's will. If she found out what he was doing before his plans materialized, she would not hesitate to frighten the stallion away for ever.

Returning, the half-breed reported the stuff too bulky to be stored in the baggage-room, but he had found a good place where it could be under cover and under lock; only the people wanted to know how

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long it was to be kept there. Carron looked at the ceiling, saw all his adventure still in the air above him. "A week," he said, and wished that he could put a lock upon the hours.

He presented himself to Beckwith's advice as a hunter inquiring of the best direction to take for game. They named him roads and trails, but none went in the direction he wanted. The Big Cañon? Lord! They scorned his suggestion. Nothing in there but eagles. None the less he was stubborn. Well then, the only way to get in was by going twenty-five miles back, someway below Raders'. There might be a trail turned off there—they couldn't say.

Carron had no intention of retracing his steps so far. Besides, he felt quite sure a trail did not turn off there. He had looked for one too well, four days ago. His thought was fixed on the little window by the Sphinx which had shown him the distance beyond. Esmeralda Charley, listening to the description of this, was not sanguine about it as a point of passage through the hills. In the end they made an expedition straight out from Beckwith to the cañon wall—ten miles across very vile country, and spent the afternoon investigating the chance for an inlet there. Nothing was possible, the hills becoming a high rampart of shard, their bases steep

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slides of stone. Furthermore, Carron was not prepared to risk the utmost here. It was too distant altogether from Raders to seem a likely place, and to his knowledgeable eye, it was subtly unlike the creature he was seeking. They returned to the town at dusk. He had no thought of starting for Raders' that night. He wished that he might have found some one bound in that direction who could have carried a note; but he was too full of calculations of moonrise, of trails, and possibilities of rock formations to reflect long on what the Raders might think.

Through all the night he was wakeful and his mind at work. To go back to the place, twenty-five miles below, where the road turned aside from the cañon, to make his way without a trail, up the difficult Highway of the Gods, through the gates, into the circle of mountains which was the Big Cañon, would be in itself a full day's work. And, once entering it, what then? In it he could not see it. He might waste days, lost among peak and declivity. It would be like entering a maze. But, from this side of the cañon wall, to ascend to the Sphinx's window and look through it, would be looking upon the maze from a balloon. From this place, set high above, he might observe the trend of mountain and valley, the direction of the river, whose voice had reached him from a distance; he

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might choose, from here, the route best for his compass to follow; perhaps sight certain places more likely than others for the habitat of a horse, some place in the course of the river where a wild creature might go to drink. The window had a look of having been purposely set there by fate.

From the top of the watershed, on the following morning, he pointed it out to Esmeralda Charley, just as the sun was getting up over the great head, crowning it with a circlet of terrible gold. The little half-breed, blinking at the sight, let drop unexpectedly the thought of a philosopher. Rocks like that, he observed, that were meant to be looked at, never meant anything more.

Carron bit his lip. He knew he was taking a chance as wide as the cañon, but wide chances were all the hope he had in sight. They would have a little closer look at it anyway, he determined. Here they were at the point nearest to the hills. At the worst they would not have more than three miles. The long back of the watershed stretched with a gentle downward slant out toward the wall of the Sugar Loafs, and together the two began to work their way forward along it, among the rocks and bushes.

It was not a difficult way, although no trail was visible, but Carron could see from the action of the

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pony that the animal had never taken this route before. The cautious planting of his feet, the doubtful side to side motion of his head, as if he denied the possibility of getting anywhere, a general air of unwillingness, of having to be pushed along, spoke unfamiliarity with the place. As they went on, the outcropping of rock became more frequent. Great faces of it rose to the surface of the thin soil, and down them the horses footed it daintily or cautiously slid. The sides of the long, extended height dropped away more sharply. On either hand they looked down upon thick tree-tops. His companion murmured that they were running into a sack.

Carron tried to peer over the low pines which were thickening in front, to see into what sort of country the nose of the watershed ran; but the descent was too steep for this to be visible, though by the drop of the land from the buttes opposite he gathered that a hollow valley was between. Purple shadows still lay like water at the foot of the hills, but their tops shone yellow, and the new day, beating full upon the Sphinx's face, gave it a bland, almost blank, appearance. The shape of the head and the winged helmet were there, but the haunting expression was confounded in the bright light. He frowned, staring aloft for a hint of it.

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The half-breed's voice sang out, shrill and sudden. Carron pulled rein before he looked. These warnings came sometimes on the verge. He was far enough from the edge on this occasion, but edge there was nevertheless, here where it had been least expected. The end of the watershed was cut down, sliced off. Years past some mass of water might have run flood full here, and worn it away. But now, at the bottom, wound only a belt of dark sand, with a narrow stream flowing in the heart of it. It had made no murmur to warn them, being summer water. This river bottom was all that lay between them and the cañon wall; but the descent into it was most uninviting, neither a precipice, over which a man might be lowered, nor a possible hill-side offering a trail, but a face of rock slanted at forty-five degrees, where a man must use his feet, yet could not keep his footing without a rope. Getting out of the saddle, Carron walked forward and looked up and down the course of the stream.

The power that had cut the watershed had sliced the hills with the same knife. Cliff it was as far as the eye could see. The face presented was irregular, however, now low, now high, as the land ran. The place where he stood must have a height of fifteen feet. Upon the right it scarcely reached six above the river basin; but he saw that to descend the side

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of the watershed would be more difficult now than to descend its face. He felt as, when a child, he had scrambled to the end of a tree limb and had to take a choice of scrambling all the way back or dropping to the ground. He had always preferred to drop. He was preparing to do that now. It meant leaving the half-breed and the horses on the head of the cliff and voyaging across the stream and up to the window of the Sphinx on foot, and alone. He was rather glad of that. The long rope was fastened about his body; Esmeralda Charley made a half-hitch around a stout little pine tree and Carron, beginning the descent, with the first step, loosed a shower of little stones.

They were not such pebbles as lodge in granite crevices, but particles of the rock itself. It was shale, treacherous stuff. Firm looking projections crumbled away under his feet like cheese. There was not a bush for a hold, not a solid thing anywhere, to grasp. Now he slid, and the rope sprang taut on his body; now on hands and knees he crept, slowly working his way down, backward. Half way down his foot found what seemed not a projection but a crevice, large enough to get his toes into. He tested it, rested weight upon it, felt inclined to trust it, and, without lifting his head, shouted for more rope. Nothing responded. He

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looked up, thinking perhaps that with his head down his voice had failed to carry, and for the instant rested full weight on the rope. At that instant Esmeralda Charley threw the slack. Carron felt himself topple back. His foot tore out of the crevice. Then the spring of the lariat around his body pulled the breath out of him. He was jerked up again so violently that he was flung flat against the cliff. His last instinct was to protect his face. He felt a blow on the side of the head, and began to drop away into a cold, ringing darkness. At intervals he heard Esmeralda Charley's voice, calling faintly from a distance. He became aware of intense pain in his head, increasing with the increasing return of light, and the half-breed's voice seemed to be getting louder again. He must be drawing nearer. Carron languidly opened his eyes.

He was looking down into the sand and water, still some feet below. The side of his head that ached still rested upon the face of the rock. Vaguely astonished he rolled his head around and saw before him the mountain as a great silhouette, a wall upon the blinding sky; and opening through it, looking softly upon him, was that blue eye of distance. Within it he saw mountains like a dream, far away, ineffable, another world.

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"Are you all right? Are you all right?" the repeated cry grew clearer to his returning consciousness. He looked up and saw the dark face of Esmeralda Charley peering over the edge of the declivity. Half stunned yet, Carron found his voice.

"Yes, I'm all right. I want to lie still a moment." He was getting his bearings, and realizing what had happened—nothing serious, nothing but his own infernal clumsiness and Esmeralda Charley's attempt to jerk him back to his feet, instead of letting him roll down a little way with the slack of the lariat. He sat up in a fine temper, conscious of a throbbing head, but feeling steady enough. "Don't pull me up," he called, feeling the lariat strain around him, "I'm going on. Pay out now when I tell you."

He heard the half-breed warning him to be careful—of what, he couldn't make out. He was too much occupied with not making another slip, and with determining in what sort of place he was going to land. The rock shelved out, perhaps a couple of feet into the sand. Stretching his legs he slid in a shower of fragments, and stood upright upon the level at last. His feet were still upon rock, but a foot in front was wet sand. He looked up and down. As far as could be seen the dark gray streak

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in which the shrunken river made its bed was constant. From above, the place where he now stood had seemed narrow enough; but confronted, it was wide indeed. He could hardly throw a stone across it, and as far as the dampness of the water spread, the sand had a tremulous, liquid quiver. Carron did not like the look of it. "Nasty going," he thought it. These little half-dry creek beds were sometimes hard to pull your legs through. The best way to take them was with a rush. He loosened the rope from his body, let it swing back behind him, kicked off his shoes, fastened them around his neck, and leaned back against the cliff to get what start was possible.

The impetus of his rush carried him a little way out; then he was in over the knees, still going forward. He was in to the thighs before he knew it. The sensation was not of sinking, but of being drawn down. He heaved against the weight that thrust upon him from every side, and advanced not an inch. A crazy conviction took him that somehow he could put forth inhuman strength to combat this resistance; that, to get across, some supernatural power would be given him. But the only thing supernatural he was conscious of was the power beneath his feet. He heard the sing of the lariat passing close to his cheek as the half-breed

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threw it. It was thrown twice before he could grasp it. With some sharp tugging on the half-breed's part, using himself and the tree as a windlass, and some hard treading on Carron's, he was dragged by degrees, and with a sucking sound, out of the mouth of the quicksand.

Wet to the arm-pits, trembling with the exertion he had made, perspiration upon his forehead, he reached the little projecting ledge of rock. He had had worse moments of danger. There had been no danger worth thinking about, with the half-breed there to throw a rope. The fear of a man, newly escaped death, was not his, but the disgust and the anger of a man who has not succeeded. To have failed by so narrow a margin! To have been kept back by so puny a stream—thumped on the head by a rock and then half swallowed by a wretched patch of sand! He put up his handkerchief, mopped the blood that was running down his neck, and looked up at his enemy, the Sphinx. The mass of the head gazed over him, and past him. No shadow upon it pointed an eyelash toward him; no quiver on the large front, nothing that recognized him, lying on the ledge, like a hooked fish. He waited a little longer, recovering strength; then with throbbing head, throbbing wrists, and a beating determination, he painfully reascended the nose of the

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watershed and at the top lay down to dry himself in the sun.

His flask and the bread that he had, helped to restore him. He rested while Esmeralda Charley roped himself down one side of the rocky promontory upon which they lay, and set off northward, prospecting the bank of the stream. Returning in the course of two hours, the man reported that perhaps six miles up from the watershed the quicksand made a wide swing across the valley to the hills. But at that point, he said, it would be impossible to get down with the horses, as there was still considerable cliff. He thought that to get around they would have to go back to Beckwith.

Carron looked up at the sun, and then at his watch. Twenty miles from where they were merely to reach the Sugar Loafs? And then to make their way down, ten miles or more over a country of broken stone, and probably involve themselves again in the sand? He suspected a sink somewhere about the base of the hills, where the stream dropped. Such waters flow now above ground, now sunk. That implacable lady, the Sphinx, had surrounded herself with a wall and a moat. He had scaled the one, but he was left on the brink of the other, a thwarted besieger.

The afternoon had drawn toward a close, when

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the horse-breaker and the half-breed parted company, the half-breed to Beckwith to wait for fresh instructions, Carron toward Raders'. As he rode, he looked over the country. He had surveyed it before, seen it heavily wooded, deeply gullied, and put it down as improbable. Now he knew it impossible, at least as far as the quicksand went. This must disappear as the country passed from plain to forest, from shallow hollow to precipice; but to travel here without a trail, to chance crossing the transverse ravines, and spend Heaven knows what time at it, for the sake of a mere look into the cañon—that chance was too wide, even for him!

Yet his eyes kept busy prying at the edges of the forest. The jealous trees must be hiding a path somewhere behind their skirts. As he came to the crest of the long descent, the last hill before Rader's, he saw an opening among the bushes on the left. He reconnoitered and found a wagon track leading downward; rode a little way along it, with rising hope, and saw its destination was a house. The roof was so gray and mottled by weather that from the road it would have looked like part of the trees surrounding it. For a moment hope lingered. The place might be a deserted cabin, and the wagon track lead on past it. Then he heard voices, and in the clearing before the house he saw the flutter of

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a woman's skirt. Evidently this was not the way to the Sphinx! He retraced his steps. His stubborn mind pursued the one thought—there must be another way to come at it then. There was always another way. His body, innured to hours in the saddle and to great exertions, felt the discomforts of the adventure but little. It was in his mind that he suffered. So easy the thing had looked and proved so difficult! In every direction he had tried he had found an obstacle, whether the dead wall of a rock or of a coward's fear of consequences; the quicksand of a river, or of a girl's mind. To say he was defeated, that he had given up, did not occur to him. The higher the difficulty, the higher he looked to meet it. He had gone too far into the thing to dream of failure now.

Approaching Raders', he grew conscious of his dilapidated appearance. He was obliged to keep his handkerchief bound around the cut that still bled a little, and he was a spectacle of mud to the waist. He looked forward to meeting those people and their questions with an unconscious bracing of capacity. There was nothing extraordinary in a hunter having had hair-breadth escapes; but in a dry and burning season, and in a country of rock, there were few places where a man might drop into a mud-hole. There might be only one quicksand

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in the county. And what would a hunter have been doing upon a plain on the second day of his hunting?

His mind saw the suspicion grow in Blanche Rader's confident eyes. As for Mrs. Rader, she already suspected him of something, and, woman fashion, she would, therefore, be prepared to suspect him of anything. The scholar, of course, would know what he had been about, and the old fellow had dropped him a hint that in his austere conception of the affair, the girl's refusal ought to put an end to the quest. Now, when he saw it had not, perhaps, in spite of his fine reassurances, he would consider it his duty to reveal what was going forward. Carron felt he was going forth against antagonists; for, gentle as they were, they seemed all to be against him. Nevertheless, he turned into the loop of the drive with that mixed sense of familiarity and strangeness that one feels, after an absence, upon returning home. The pale, austere front of the house was more welcome to him than ever the classic aspect of his mother's house in Connecticut. This impression of homelikeness was added to presently by the sight of an expectant figure. It was revealed as that of the scholar. He was moving rather restlessly along the porch of the old wing, now and then stretching

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his head on his long neck to look out between the vines. Seeing Carron, his face relaxed into a smile. He raised his hand above his head, in joyful salute, and hurried to the steps, as the young man rode up. "My dear boy, we have been wondering—why, I'm very glad to see you! The women have been quite frightened."

"Frightened?" Carron echoed, feeling somewhat mystified.

"Yes, your not coming back last night. Of course, I told them you were all right. Two days, more or less, is nothing—and a man can't send a note out of the wilderness. Still women, you know!" He expressively waved his hand. "Mrs. Rader has gone down to the Ferriers now, to see if perhaps they had heard anything of you."

"Mrs. Rader has?" Carron had become an echo of astonishment.

"Yes," the scholar sighed, and added, "she kept me awake quite a little last night, fussing about it."

Taken aback, ashamed of his recent suspicions, touched, Carron hadn't yet heard the name he most wanted.

"You are all right, aren't you?" Rader continued. His manner slowed a little from the unwonted vivacity of excitement. "What is that around your head?"

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"I cut myself up in the rocks and then got into the mud. It's nothing."

"Ah! well," the scholar surveyed him with an almost affectionate glance, "the women will fix you up. They'll love to." He hesitated, lowered his voice, leaning forward, "You didn't—?" The rest of the query was in his eyes. It spoke of the secret that was between them.

Carron smiled rather grimly. "No, I—"

He stopped. A door had opened suddenly. Not the one fronting the steps, but one farther down the porch, opening out of the living-room. Blanche Rader stood there. She held a long piece of white stuff in one hand. It trailed to the floor and she had trodden upon it. He knew she was looking at him, but did not see her expression; saw her there only as the symbol of his difficulties, fragile, yet triumphant where he had failed. She was like the Sphinx. She was the Sphinx—perhaps the very core of it, unreasoning, not to be moved, set there in his path, the perverse deity who had led him and then held him back. Oh, to get hold of her; to put her completely out of the way, upon some high shelf of the universe where she could not do any harm! Where she could no longer interrupt his thoughts and disturb his affairs, and make of life a thing of furies and elations.

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She had disappeared, she had vanished through the door again, without a word, without a motion of recognition, leaving him only the memory of her gaze, which, now she was gone, he knew had not been like the Sphinx. It had not been implacable. It had been appealing. In heaven's name what could he do for such a creature as she? It was she who could do much for him.

He did not very well know what else Rader said to him. His thoughts beat this way and that, boiled up with his exasperations, retreated before the memory of the girl's face, bore forward toward success, with all the nature of the man to press on. He put up the pony in the stable, took off the bandage from his head, and walked back to the house with some vague, surface idea of going up-stairs, cleaning up, getting a bath. The house was still. This time there was no one on the veranda. He walked slowly along to the living-room door, opened it, went in, with a quickening pulse. No one there. A pair of scissors and a pin-cushion were upon the table. She had fled. From what? He wondered what she was afraid of. He had not wanted to frighten her. He only wanted to find her. He went out into the hall, that hall of many doors. The late day made it dark, and only by the pale, shining, neutral illumination could he see that one of these doors was half

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open. He moved it back noiselessly upon its hinge and looked.

He was in the little sewing-room where he had seen her the morning he had proposed their ride. Here, too, twilight was gathered. The walls were dusky, the furniture dim; only at the window a light came; and here, close to it, Blanche Rader was sitting, sewing. Her gown was white, and flowed off into shadow. She did not move when he came in, she did not quiver an eyelash, her hands did not cease their regular motion. Softly, so as not to startle her into consciousness of his presence, he entered and sat down in a chair farthest from her, deepest in shadow.

From here he saw her face in profile. Her head was bent and held a little to one side. The last of the day shone on the curve of her chin, the curve of her lips, lay upon her forehead, found bronze in her hair, and touched the edge of her red ribbon to fire. Her shoulders drawn a little forward by their task and the turn of her long throat lent something pathetic to her aspect. Her hands rapidly drew the thread in and out. He watched her. He was weary with exertion, aching with the cut on his head. He was an expert plainsman, had lost two days and was no nearer the object of his search, nor the way of reaching it, than he had been at first. This

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girl, curled over her sewing, had it all in her head. Deep hidden she kept it and hugged the secret. To her it had been given to see a wonder, rarely seen, even by night-walking foresters or leafy dwellers outside the law. Had she been abroad at moonset, that such a chance had befallen her, or at that bright Greek interval before the sunrise? What way had she followed? What way could a woman follow where he had found none? From what place had she looked—the cap of a mountain, an eyrie of trees, or up, from a hollow in the earth? Her eyes, fixed now on the flashing needle, had looked upon Son of the Wind; had seen him, not in the terrors of flight, but in the splendor of his trampling, unafraid approach. Yes, and they would see him again. That was the thought that spurred. Could a man but take her, and break her knowledge out of her, as wine out of a glass.

He saw her hands were moving faster, with a nervous intensity; her breast was rising and falling with quick, short breaths. There was a quiver of her underlip and she took it between her teeth. The idea came to him that she was aware of his presence. She knew that he was there, sitting and staring at her. She must have known from the very first. The failing light added to the mystery between them. Why hadn't she spoken? Why didn't

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she speak now? Her fingers shook, but they flew for a wager. What could he say, since something must be said? She was trembling, relaxed as if expectant of something—what, he did not know. That consciousness she had of him, the curious dread that tied her tongue, gave him the knowledge that now was his time—now he had power over her.

He got to his feet. With the movement, the motion of her hands stopped. They held the work up nervously. Her head lifted, dropped back a little. She did not look at him. He started toward her with still the great question on his tongue. Where that question went he did not know. He reached her and she was on her feet. Had she risen to meet him, or had he drawn her up by the hands? He did not know. Her hands were in his, both hands in his one. At the touch other thought slipped away from him. He knew himself trembling, and was not surprised. With the first breath of her hair—that faint, sweet personal perfume—he understood the peril. He felt the noose of the charm descending upon him. He felt, before he touched her lips, the approach of an unknown emotion.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. RADER HAS A WORD TO SAY

THEY drew back a little and looked at each other with startled eyes—people who have been awake, now in a dream. Like a dream he saw blue iris just beneath his gaze, a dull wave of hair, white hands in the dusk, and felt a hurrying heart. The heavenly interval of wonder was upon him, when desire halts, abashed at the miracle. Why should she suddenly twist herself from him as if he had become an enemy? She had turned to him willingly, not caught, not yielding, but giving herself. Why shatter the divine, unconscious moment? It was his surprise that released her; his instinct caught at her to keep her, but caught only her dress. The weak stuff tore in his hand. The work-box on the edge of the table overturned. A shower of little objects fell, ringing and scattering on the floor. She slid through his fingers. Her skirt whipped around the door. He trod on needles in the dark, and, cursing, felt some dreadful, soft little thing, which was a pin-cushion, beneath his feet.

The sound of the door behind him closing made

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him face about. That door had been shut when he came into the room. Now Mrs. Rader was standing just within it, her hand resting on the knob. It had scarcely ceased to vibrate with concussion; her gown still fluttered back with her motion just arrested, but arrested by something that had startled her. In the gloom her face was a mere white shadow, with dark shadows for eyes; no expression to read, but the intense, fixed poise of the head had significance. Carron suffered pure panic. He kept himself standing where he was only by an effort of will. He was ready on the spot for all the condemnation woman can call down on man's head, ready to commit himself to anything to rescue the unhappy situation. He looked at her and smiled.

"I have upset your daughter's work-basket," he said, and, going down on his knees, began to grope on the dark floor, gathering spools. Mrs. Rader did not speak; and in that horrid interval while he pricked his fingers, and felt the coursing of the blood in his ears, what reason he had left reasserted itself. She had not seen the kiss—that unpremeditated moment. She had come in too late. She had seen, perhaps, her daughter's flight through the door, heard the crash of the basket, sensed all through the room the disturbance, the crisis just past. But at least she had not seen it! His courage rose. His

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anxiety was to shield the girl in her moment of what might appear her weakness in the eye of her own sex. He looked up. Mrs. Rader was standing close to him, leaning on the table, looking down at him with irresolute face.

"I am sorry I couldn't get word to you about last night," he said, rising, speaking as cheerfully as if this was the only question that could be between them. "I am afraid from what Mr. Rader said that not knowing when to expect me has inconvenienced you."

"Oh, no—not inconvenienced! Only we were afraid—" she raised her hand to the hat she wore, a man's hat, which perhaps she had hastily pulled on when she ran to her neighbors to ask news of him. "Mr. Carron—" she began.

"Never worry over a hunter, even if he doesn't show up for a week," he reassured her, setting the work-box back on the table. "The only thing to consider is what they bring back, and I offer my humble apologies for coming empty-handed." He swung around on his heel.

"Mr. Carron," she was just behind him. Her look was anything but the virago. It was timid, as if she were afraid of him, or else afraid of herself.

"I present a figure," he explained, "that would never do to show at your dinner table. I have just

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startled Miss Rader by showing myself in my deplorable state of mud. I've got to hurry, if I'm going to change."

"I must speak to you!" The voice went through his ears. There was no escape after all. He shut his teeth together and turned about to face the situation.

Evidently she had driven herself to a point outside her ordinary capacity. Her eyes were the only brave thing in her, but they commanded her face. "Would it make much difference to you to cut your week here a little short? Would you mind finishing somewhere else?"

This was more definite than he had expected, but it was a delicate way of putting the thing, almost like a man's. He appreciated her reserve, but there were two reasons which presented to him the awkward necessity of remaining where he was. "Of course," he answered, "if you ask it, I shall go at once. I understood it was a special exception to a rule that took me in, and that was very good of you. But there is no use saying it won't make a difference to me if I have to leave. I'm afraid you've rather spoiled me here. I've grown very fond of this place, and I like you—and Mr. Rader." He waited. Her eyes fixed him with distress, but without any relenting. It was a deadlock. "I don't doubt that a man

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is in the way while women are going over a house," he added.

She murmured, "O no! You helped us more than I can say! That is one reason why I didn't want you to—on account of what I'm having to ask you. I don't know what you will think of me!"

"I shan't think anything startling," he assured her lightly; but indeed he did not know what to think. He knew her attitude of mind had not been born suddenly of this moment's suspicions. It was the culmination of a feeling which had been hers in the past, which had been constant toward him from the first, before he saw Blanche Rader, before he even knew Blanche Rader existed. Though his mind might dart and turn, the significance of it was bewildering to fathom. "I am sorry if I have done anything to offend you," he said.

"You haven't. You have been most kind. We all like you very much. You must have noticed how Mr. Rader is. He is quite changed since you came—waked up. You have such a way!" Her voice dropped as she added below her breath, "That is just the trouble."

Carron stared at this cryptic sentence.

"You are a stranger to me, and you are a man who has come from out in the world," she continued, looking at him squarely. "Not many such come

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up here ; and as soon as I saw you I felt sure you had not come for the hunting. But how could I come to you then—a stranger—and speak of it? I don't see how I can do it now! But you were so kind about helping us day before yesterday, and doing everything that was hard, I saw—at least I thought that, if I asked you, you might not take advantage of it, at least for her sake! That, if I asked you, you might go.”

Carron stood amazed, puzzled, floored by these halting, breathless sentences, and the confused suggestions they conveyed. He had to search, to put the thing together to make anything at all ; and then he was amused at the sublime egoism of women that supposes each move a man makes to be drawn by the magnet woman. But he was also a little indignant.

“My dear Mrs. Rader, I have not come here on your daughter's account. I had never seen her before, and I have no wish to thrust my attentions upon her!” Absurd inconsistency while his lips were still hot with memories of the girl's! Yet it was true enough, he had had no “intentions” as far as Blanche Rader was concerned. The only intention he was aware of now was a wish to keep her name out of the talk at any cost. He cemented safety. “I have had no thought except that she was

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very kind and gracious to me as to a guest, I give you my word!"

Mrs. Rader's face was strange. "I know you have not," she said.

That singular intonation rang ominously to his ear. He had a dread lest the woman was on the verge of some reckless revelation, lest she should sweep him, on the tide of it, farther than he wanted to be carried. "Very well, I will make my arrangements to go to Beckwith to-morrow morning," he said coldly.

At that he heard the sharp intake of her breath. "Won't you go farther away than that? Won't you go quite away, quite out of the county?"

"My dear Mrs. Rader," he burst forth, irritated beyond control by the woman's insistence, and the quandary it placed him in, "don't you expect rather too much?"

"What difference will it make to you," she demanded despairingly, "where you hunt, when all through these counties the game is much the same? But it makes all the difference in the world to me—and to her. I have been to her. I have tried to show her, to make her—think! Do you suppose I haven't done everything, wouldn't do anything rather than come to you? But nothing moves her when she gets an idea in her head, when she wants something; and

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she has only seen the boys hereabouts, and one or two men who come here in the summer. She has always been able to do what she likes with them. You have seen how she twists poor Bert Ferrier. But you are different; you are her match! I'm afraid you're more than that. That is why I have come to you."

Dismayed and scarlet, Carron had an instinct to beat off the woman's words like enemies. "It's absurd, ridiculous! You misjudge her, Mrs. Rader. She's never had a thought. Why, she doesn't care a flip of her finger for me!" Ferrier's words! Out of Carron's mouth!

"If you haven't noticed it," Mrs. Rader said slowly, "you are the only one." The small square of the window was growing grayer behind her. The two of them had become to each other mere voices in the dark; only in her intensity, the woman showed now and then a gesture against the pale glimmer of glass. "She hasn't been herself quite, since that first morning. Do you suppose she takes as much time for most men? Do you suppose she goes out riding all the morning whenever some one asks her? Do you suppose she makes the rooms so pretty for Bert Ferrier to play whist? She is very cold and very difficult with most. O, she's clever—much cleverer than I with people; and she can keep them at a distance. As long as she isn't interested I know she's safe—

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and she has never been interested in any one before! But as soon as I saw you, I knew you were—" She was rushing upon it with the appalling passion of women for revealing truths which are intended to remain hidden, which can not bear the light, before which men recoil and quail.

"Mrs. Rader," he broke in, "I can not let you think it. I assure you you're entirely mistaken. Your daughter is—" He paused before the thought of what Blanche Rader was. He was amazed that the mother could be so oblivious of it. "She is absolutely disinterested where I'm concerned," he said flatly, and for the moment bitterly believed it. "Don't suppose anything else," he added, looking squarely into the woman's face, still skeptical and unconvinced. "I am sure neither she nor I have had any intention that could alarm you."

"I don't think people always know what they intend, or even what they are doing," Mrs. Rader said.

Carron waved exasperated arms. "I promise you I will be off to-morrow morning, if that reassures you at all; but I can not promise to go out of the county. That's nonsense!" Would she never dismiss him? Didn't she know how? Was he to stand there without hearing an answer, enduring her look for ever, feeling sorry for her, and angry with himself for feeling sorry, because that keen instinct that

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speaks the truth told him that as far as he was concerned she was all wrong?

She turned without a word, crossed the room and closed the door after her. If she had stayed longer he would have lost his temper—perhaps even his nerve.

He felt more shaken than if he had been through a fight.

He was turned out emphatically by a timid, resolute woman. For what reason? In the dark the thought made him hot.

Why should she take it for granted that the girl was in danger from him? What sort of creature did she think him—invulnerable, iron, deadly? Did she think he was in no danger himself? He knew now he was worse than in danger, hopelessly, finally carried beyond rescue. He had defended the girl as he had been bound to do by the intolerable circumstance; but now it seemed to him that it had been ill done. Suppose she told her mother of what had happened! It was not probable; but think—if Mrs. Rader rehearsed his words to Blanche what a cad the girl would think him then! And he was to leave to-morrow, without a chance to explain to her. Explain! Good Lord! Something that he could not explain to himself!

He stared into the dark with fiery thoughts. There

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had been a question he had started to ask about a horse. That would have to wait now until this thing of immediate importance was settled—the wretched uncertainty of what she thought of him. Mrs. Rader's words had sounded impossible when they had been naked and uttered; but they flowed back to his memory now with a sweet resurgence. He was buoyed up and carried off his logical footing, spun around in eddies of emotion, set down suddenly on the hard sand of doubt, cold with the subsidence of his hopes. What difference did it make what Blanche had thought of him before that wonderful moment, when, after it, she had torn herself away from him; when, by the last glance of her eyes, she had hated him?

He went out upon the side veranda. Light was not yet kindled in the kitchen windows. The dinner would be late. He went up the outside stair and passed through his room without stopping. He walked a little way down the upper hall, turning his back upon the ascending inner stair. A window at the end showed him the influence of the moon, now beginning to shine and make herself felt above the twilight. The light, diffused and gray, was still enough for him to see the door he wanted. His foot touched a small, dark object crouched in front of it. The dog, Beetles, was pressed against it with his

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nose flung up to the crack and his tail beating the floor. This little creature was accustomed to run in and out of Blanche's room at all hours, taking liberties with her time and her good nature. Now he snuggled and scratched the obstinate wood and complained. He paid no attention to the man's whistling to him, under breath. He knew no divided mind had one object.

Carron knocked very softly. Not a stir from within. He knocked again, as softly, but repeatedly. This time a smothered voice spoke.

"Who is there?"

The dog went into ecstasies of expectation. Carron did not reply; that would have been the end. He only knocked. This time he heard a step. It came slowly and stopped just on the other side of the panels. She must have put her mouth to the crack, so plainly the words came.

"What do you want?"

The soft, insistent sound of his knuckles upon the wood, so close to her, evidently became more than her nerves could bear. Suddenly she flung open the door. The dog sprang, leaping upon her; up, and, falling back, up again with the tireless resurgence of a fountain. Carron stood still. "What do you want?" she repeated, still in that smothered voice, as if some muffling thing was invisibly across

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her mouth. She looked at him and she did not look at him.

"Come down-stairs," he said.

She made a negative motion of the head.

"Come along," he insisted, "I have something to say to you."

His voice, so calmly taking it for granted that she would; his face, which revealed something of his crisis, seemed to make her obstinacy hesitate. "No. I should have to see people."

"No; you will see only me. We'll go outside." He took her by the hand, drew her through the door and closed it after her. But, alone with him in the hall, she seemed to be taken with a keener, more incoherent alarm.

"I can't go down! I can't go out! I'm afraid that some one will see us!" He looked at her in amazement—she, so sure of herself, to fall into a panic.

"No one will. We can go through my room and down the outside stair."

"No! no!"

"Come, don't be foolish."

"But they can see us from the kitchen windows."

"Very well! Is there any place in the house, then, where they can't, where we can be undisturbed for a few minutes?"

She looked about, hesitated, gave him a glance,

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half frightened and half reckless. "Yes, over here." She started down the hall, toward the window, through which the moonlight came.

He followed, perplexed. Here in the hall there was not a chair to sit in, and all was in plain view from one end to the other. She went on toward the little pane of glass as if she fancied she could float through it like a ghost; but fairly upon it she stopped, took hold of a knob, and what had appeared as a window opened into a door, like the door in his room, with an upper transparent half. They passed out of it into a balcony. It was like coming out upon the edge of the world.

No steps led down from here, no roof was over them. The place hung in air, a poor, neglected loggia, before the eye of night. In front of them were wooden pailings, imitating Italian balustrade. At one end stood a rattan couch, bleached by fronting many winters.

"Sit down here," Carron said.

She took a place near one end, a conscious distance from him, sitting at the other. The dog lay down, pressed against her feet. Above their heads a thin and gauzy fan of clouds was spread in the sky, and the moon looked through it. The balcony faced from the back of the house, and at this point the ground fell away sharply, so that instead of looking into

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pinetrees, they looked over them and saw a glimpse of distance. There was a wonderful play of silver upon these tree-tops, in hollow and hill of the moving, leafy surface—aisles of floating brightness, sparkling plains which were clearer for lying on the edge of shadow, lovelier because nowhere was the liquid brilliance of bare moonlight. All before them shone as in an enchanted veil.

The mystery was upon the girl's face, too. It was not beautiful now, yet this made no difference to him. He saw the traces of fatigue and of watching, perhaps of tears. What if, as her mother had said, she had watched and waited for him? He leaned forward, elbows on knees. The important thing he had had to say to her was just this—to be with her. To be with her for hours with nothing to explain or ask. To be with her in perfection of unconsciousness, of confidence, as they had been; not in this discord, so cruelly out of key with the beautiful country, the veil of wonder over it, and the wonder in his heart. If only he could unknit those gathered brows, make bend the guarded line of the lips, open the eyes upon him with the un-defensive sweetness they had shown him under the cedars, in the candle-light, even in the shadow of the stable that morning when he had been so careless of her that he had scarcely glanced at her! The mem-

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ory that went yet further back, of how she had pulled herself from her mother's hand on the day of their ride and come toward him, remained the sweetest, most unhappy thought. Now she was like a door locked against him; like a house, dark. All the strength in her seemed gathered together to exclude him. Each time he stirred he could feel her start, as if, of all things, his touch was what she most dreaded.

"You are making a bad mistake about us, aren't you?" he said. "You seem to think that what happened down-stairs a little while ago was very terrible."

She was silent.

"I thought it was beautiful."

"I don't want to talk about it," she said, under her breath.

"Neither do I—but I must. I can't stand the way you look at me—as if I were a beast; and I'm not—to you!" He floundered, helpless to explain himself. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I only meant—"

"I don't in the least care what you meant," she interrupted, with a hard, dry voice, she seemed to gather from her chest.

"Yes, you do!" Carron said fiercely. She was trying to build up a wall between them, and he would have it down. "You don't tell me you were

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playing then, when we—a woman like you wouldn't!"

"I didn't know what I was doing."

"You did." He would not let her off so easily. "We both knew a good deal better then than we do now, when we are talking so much about it. I hadn't seen you for two days—how could I tell how I was going to be? It came—and now it's done. And everything looks different. Can't you understand? I have never felt like this before. I didn't know there was such a feeling! This isn't the usual thing, and you know it."

Her eyes, half lifted, took this in with a long, silent regard, without expressing a spark of what she hid, without visible change—glide of iris, or flutter of lashes—gradually a new expression appeared in them. "You weren't like this then!" she said.

"Down-stairs? I was."

She shook her head. "You were strange! All last night, all to-day, I had been afraid that something had happened to you." She jerked out the words in rapid, breathless sentences. "Because, last night, we were to go out to the Witch's Spindle; and I knew something must have happened, or you wouldn't have stayed away. Then, when I saw you—and your head hurt—I knew, of course! And I would have come to you, but you frightened me, you

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looked so angry. I couldn't understand it; and when you came into the sewing-room, as though you thought I did not hear you, and sat there looking at me so hard, I didn't know—I couldn't think what I had done, but it seemed to me I had done you some injury, some cruel injury! And when you—”

“Never mind that,” Carron said. For a moment, instead of the girl's face before him, he saw the head of the Sphinx. It rose to his mind like a sign of his failure and his delay. It spoke to him of necessities of times and ways and haste. He let it sink back, beneath memory.

“Is your head badly hurt?” she asked in a half voice, and he felt five soft, round finger-tips exploring in his hair.

He took the hand and drew it down. “Look here—I have never been angry with you. How could I be? I wouldn't do anything to hurt you or distress you for the world. You know that, don't you?”

This time her head nodded.

He tipped his back to look up into her face, a little humorously. “Then am I forgiven?”

“There is nothing to forgive.”

“Ah, you're right about that,” he said quickly. “Didn't you know that in the first place?” She became dumb. “Did you think I was an easy sort, was that way with most women?”

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"No, no, I didn't! I don't know what I thought! I can't tell you."

"I will tell you anything you want to know," Carron said. "I'll tell you what I'm thinking now." But indeed he was not thinking. He was no more thinking than a swimmer is walking, when, just over his depth in water, he feels his chin buoyed up and his toes scarcely touching the sand. In all his logical, hard-worked life he had never felt any sensation so heavenly as this one—of being set afloat in the warm tide of emotion. His hands glided around hers. He would have set his cheek against the broad, white arch of her forehead.

"Oh, no, no, no," she kept murmuring, a shower of protesting little words, and straining away. "I can't,—*to-night!*" The last word came out with such force that it had to be answered.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I can't think!"

He was ready to laugh at such an excuse; but the next moment he was made to listen.

"I *will* not!" with a sudden passion of resolution.

"Oh!" He clasped his hands together behind him, held them tight, and looked straight before him into an extraordinarily blank future. He knew she was watching him. "To-morrow—" she dropped the little word tentatively, timidly.

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The sound of it was a whip to him. "To-morrow I won't be here!" He saw how that struck her. The thought that what became of him could hurt her, gave him pleasure. "I am going away indefinitely," he said. Still she kept looking at him with the same blank face as if she hardly understood. She didn't speak. He could see no change of expression, but he realized a chill in her mood, cold, where a moment before she had been hot.

"You don't suppose I'm going because I want to?" he asked indignantly.

"I hope you are not going for any other reason."

The tone was like snow, blank and pallid; but the film in her bright eyes might be suffering. His resolution to keep Mrs. Rader's plea to him a secret, melted at the sight. "I am going because I've been asked to," he said, and could not resist a grimace.

She gave him a stare, haughty and astonished. A flag of color flew in her cheeks. "What do you mean?"

"Your mother," Carron said. It was wonderful to see how the color failed, and returned again.

"Did she—?"

"No, she didn't see anything—at least anything that matters. But, as perhaps you know, she came in just as you rushed out; and, well, she saw there had been some little disturbance. She's never had

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any great fancy for me, thinks I'm a poor sort of person to have around, and I believe she found it a good opportunity to make her suggestion."

"What excuse did she give?"

Carron felt the matter was assuming an alarming aspect. "Well, house-cleaning, you know. Men are rather in the way."

"After you'd helped her!"

"You mustn't fly off and say anything about this," he protested, "and make it worse."

"But how could she? What right has she to interfere with us? I'm of age!"

"Very true, and all that, but don't you see I can't argue the point with her? When a woman asks you to get out, you can't ask for reasons."

"But I can," Blanche rose. The bold spirit, which a few moments ago had seemed to be shaken out of her, was in full possession. She looked ready to storm a city.

This time Carron took *her* hand too firmly for any denial. "You will not do anything of the sort. I've promised—and there's no getting out of it. Go to her about it, and you'll only make her think me a cad, who has gone to you to get you to beg him off."

"I won't make a scene. It will be all right."

"But I've said everything any human being could, in decency. Do you suppose I haven't?"

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She smiled; her hand was on the door. "Yes, but I haven't. Come—hurry!"

"Don't go in!" he begged. "Let's stay out here!"

"No, no!" She gave a quick look around at the little balcony. "Come!" She opened the door hurriedly and fairly pulled him through. He saw she was panting as if in a new fright.

"Were you afraid they would find us?" he asked curiously.

"No," she scorned him. "Why should I mind that?"

"You strange girl, you did. Just a little while ago, I had to coax you to get you to come out with me at all."

"O, that was different," she said. They were walking together down the moon-misted hall.

"Different?"

"Yes. I was afraid of them, I was afraid of everything, because—"

"Out with it!"

The fire of mischief, and of something larger looked through her eyes. "I didn't know then what you thought of me." She ran ahead of him down the stair.

He did not feel certain what trouble she was about to plunge him into, with her headlong determination

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to bend her mother's resolute mind. He could think of no argument subtle, and appealing to Mrs. Rader's hospitality or vanity which he had not employed himself, and quite in vain. But Blanche seemed to entertain no doubts of herself, though she entered the dining-room late, just after the laggard scholar was seated; could not, therefore, have already interviewed her mother, who had been at table when Carron first came in. No word had passed between these two, while they waited for the others. They had gone beyond the banalities, and what they had had to say of importance to one another was finished. Their silence was austere. The girl reflected nothing of this, but kept her excited eyes veiled, and combated the tendency to an upward curl of the corners of her mouth. Except for such Puck-like manifestations she was demure, almost silent, and seemed interested in her dinner. Rader was the one of that curiously mooded quartet who seemed in a fund of talk.

"So you're back!" he said as if this was the greatest personal satisfaction to him, and reaching lean, long fingers to Carron, shook hands on the event. Mrs. Rader's eyes were caught by the sight of this, fascinated. Blanche looked down.

"I suppose these women have fussed over you to their hearts' content," the scholar continued. "They

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are very free with the plaster even if you've cut nothing but your finger."

"You didn't tell me you were hurt," Mrs. Rader faltered.

"I'm not—nothing but a bit of broken skin." He was immensely annoyed the matter should have come up at all. "I'd forgotten all about it."

"Don't you want some arnica?" She seemed on the point, then and there, of doing her conscience-smitten best.

"A bottle of Burgundy will do more good," Rader determined. "I brought some up to celebrate." He looked a little puzzled by Carron's cynical regard. "It's really very good, '84," he murmured. He hesitated, sent an inquiring glance at his daughter, just darted and withdrawn. She paid no attention to it; didn't seem to see it. "And by the way," he said, still more pointedly to Carron, "if you have any time to-morrow afternoon, won't you come in and see my *Spectators*? First edition, they are as worth while looking at as anything you can see."

This was awkward. "I should be delighted, but I'm afraid I shall be away."

"O, take a day off between whiles. You're played out. A couple of days ago, the day before you went, you promised me you would."

Carron couldn't recall this, but didn't want to

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deny. He felt himself cornered. To blurt out facts here in the face of every one might be the ruin of Blanche's schemes. But to the devil with a woman's schemes! He was sick of them! They never accomplished anything! The fact would be out in the morning anyway. "I mean I expect to leave tomorrow, permanently," he said. "I was only to be here for a week, you know."

Rader exclaimed in astonishment. "But it's not a week; you haven't been here five days! What are you thinking of? Hermione, do you hear that?"

She looked certainly taken aback, much dismayed. She murmured, "Perhaps Mr. Carron would be more comfortable in a house that wasn't so upset."

"He'd be a great deal less comfortable in any of the other places around here. That's no reason at all," Rader declared emphatically. "Why not stay at least till the end of the week?"

For the first time since the subject had been opened Blanche looked up. "Why shouldn't Mr. Carron stay until the end of his vacation?" she remarked casually. "It is only two weeks."

The poor woman looked at her daughter with a defeated eye. She seemed to be conscious of the spirit in the house, the trampling spirit of youth that was conspiring against her, beating her determination down.

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"First rate!" Rader acclaimed. "And perhaps if these women are through making you move sofas about, you wouldn't mind looking at my windows and tell me why they stick so. I can't open them."

Mrs. Rader made a horrified, protesting sound, while her daughter shook with laughter.

"I could regulate the weights of those before I go in the morning," Carron suggested. He felt that so much was only decent.

"Why we won't have such talk," Rader declared. "Hermione, make him stay."

Mrs. Rader flushed. The color was bright in her sensitive face, as she opened her mouth to pronounce the required words. Carron was sorry for her—so sorry that it seemed almost easier to refuse the request which went no deeper than the lips. But it would have taken a prig or a saint to perform that part. No man could have done it, with the girl upon the other side of the table, her mouth of such a haughty unconcern, her eyes sending such shining, triumphant, inexplicable glances. It seemed to him they had both been, for the moment, favorites of fate.

The scholar, with the Burgundy, kept him sitting after Mrs. Rader had gone into the kitchen. Her daughter rose to follow her out. Carron tried to catch her eye. She ignored him and he heard the

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rustle of her passing at his back. Then it paused. That incarnation of Puck was behind his chair.

"Didn't father speak his part beautifully? Didn't I do that nicely?" she whispered. Then went off on tiptoe, unattainable for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER X

WISDOM SET AT NAUGHT

LOVE, who engages herself to be the impossible, and performs all manner of valors to prove herself, makes her appointments at unwonted seasons. She got these two up at a gray hour, when looking at the sky is like looking up into a pearl. With nothing so gross as words for understanding they foresaw each other's impulse. They were led out and found each other. Voices of birds were faintly awakened among the trees. Large shapes of forests and mountains had not yet fallen asleep in the sun. The world around them had the still face of awe. They saw it as a background for each other's face, smiling and full of color, full of the rapture of living. The moon had woven no illusions. They were not to be disappointed. They suffered no diminution of spirits in the high, even light and wide spaces. They saw each other real. They called to each other from a distance, and ran together with a thousand questions.

They walked down the sloping floor of the woods

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while the light greatened and the shadows grew dark beneath their feet; together, near, yet not near enough for touching, released from everything but each other, bound to each other and not knowing it. Their voices flowed together.

"And what did you think when you first saw me?"

"I thought you had a great opinion of yourself and had come up here for some important reason—perhaps to buy the place."

"And I thought you were two people, a child and a woman. I think so still, only you are many more persons yet. You were so funny, such a cool hand, and so sophisticated."

"O, me! I didn't feel so. I was quite in awe of you, even before I saw you, to hear mother talk."

"She didn't want me to stay?"

"Yes, she did, rather, really; but she felt as I did, you see, that wherever you were something was bound to happen."

"And now it has?"

She smiled, was silent.

"She didn't want it to?"

"She doesn't know you."

Carron had a thought that up to this time he had not known himself.

"She thinks, you know," Blanche explained, "that you and I are still only strangers."

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"Then she doesn't know," Carron said, quite gravely. They disposed thus of caution and experience.

"But I don't think she'll mind so much now, when she gets used to the idea," Blanche told him. "What did she say to you afterward?"

"Nothing. You wicked girl! to make her, when she hates me!"

"She doesn't hate you, she only has a silly idea about you; that you are a terrible, dangerous person."

"O, ho, and didn't you have some such idea yourself?"

"No." They could laugh together about it now, so much had grown between them, through the night, while they had not seen each other. "That was quite different."

"Then what made you run away?"

"O, that was because—"

"Yes—because?"

She drooped, looking down. "It wasn't you, it was myself I thought was terrible. I felt as if I had given myself away, just made a gift of myself, to some one who didn't want me."

"Yes! Think of my taking you in that way! Think of my taking you tolerantly, forbearingly! Why I—" He would have shown her again how he

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would take her, but it was "hands off" with her yet. She would permit not so much as a finger-tip. This arbitrary distance she imposed between them kept an uneasy fog of distrusts in his heart. A thought came, like a black shadow. "How about Ferrier?" he said.

She opened large eyes, as if to take in a presence so small to her mind that she could hardly see it. "Well, what of him?"

"Has he anything to say about—this?"

Humor was mixed with the disdain that lifted the corners of her mouth. "I should like to hear him! Why?" The resentment of outside interference, a tendency overquick in her, looked out at him. "Has mother said anything to you about him?"

"Not a word," he declared hastily. "I only thought from the way he behaved the night we played whist—"

"How did he behave? I didn't notice him."

Carron had a very clear memory of exactly the way Ferrier had looked, backing down the road in the half moon's light, sending back his warning. "Like a man who has a claim."

"Well, he has not!" she said indignantly, but still with an impulse to smile, as if she could scarcely take the matter seriously. "Poor Bert! I'm afraid mother is a little responsible for the way he feels;

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she likes him. He's so harmless." She smiled understandingly upon Carron. "He's a good boy to her, fetches and carries, when he isn't sitting around some store, reading the socialistic weeklies. And then, he's good-looking."

"Good-looking!" Was that her translation of the appearance of the knock-kneed male! Carron exclaimed in his mind over the ideas of women. "And *you* don't like him?"

"Well, of course, I can't admire Bert. He's weak. There are things about him that are deplorable. He won't lift his finger to help his brother, would not even acknowledge him if I didn't make him."

"His brother?"

"Yes, you know, George."

"Good Lord!"

"I forgot—you feel that way too. But still, if he was your brother, you know you would look out for him. It seems cruel. It is because Bert is ashamed of it, and so terribly afraid of what people will think. As if that mattered! But, in a way, I'm fond of Bert. I've known him so long and so well; and he is very loyal."

Carron looked at her with compunction, with silent pity. She had known the fellow so long, eight years! And this was her idea of him. Did she suppose that weakness and loyalty ever went together?

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"He will do anything for me," she said.

Carron could believe her there. What the fellow would do for her—which was to say for the sake of possessing her—had been made evident. He had been ready even to chance the risk of losing her for that. What he would do disinterestedly for her, was nothing. It had taken the horse-breaker just four days to add up Ferrier's mental sum; and the impulse was on his tongue to speak it. Speak not only that, but his own as well. The story of his coming and the reason of it. Why not show her, as Rader had urged, his side of the business—risk his plea? But she was not his as yet, was she? He was not certain. She seemed to be hovering on the edge of giving herself up; suppose this question of his be all that was needed to startle her away?

"He hasn't and never has had a ghost of a reason to expect anything of me," she said decidedly after a minute when she had seemed to be weighing a question in her mind. "Then, a few weeks ago, we had a misunderstanding about something, something he did that was not like a gentleman. We haven't been very good friends since."

Carron clapped that information to the hint that the scholar had let fall, which was, that Ferrier had come by his knowledge of the horse in some way not quite open. Blanche had put it, not like a

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gentleman. Well, that description fitted the fellow like a cap. Evidently that finished his question. He threw the matter of Ferrier to the winds. "Then, if he is nothing to you, why won't you—" His arms tried to clasp her, and closed on empty air.

She laughed at him. "What a funny thing you are, always looking for a reason, or a fact!"

It dawned on him that she had no reason in the world to keep away from him, except that mysterious, buried reason of women, that she wanted to. She seemed to find this interval while they were near, yet not so near as even to clasp hands, the most to be cherished; like the hour in which they walked, beautiful only because the sun is coming, yet most beautiful before it rises.

He could not understand her here. What he wanted, he wanted to have in fact, not to dream of how he might have it; he lacked the poison of the idealist, who suspects the thing he can touch. He loved the more for possessing. Her holding him off appeared to him a sentimental scruple; but the awe love brings to its object made him almost patient with her whim. Love—the word had not been used between them; it might not yet have been formed in her mind; and he was as shy of the spoken sound as a half-grown boy is of a kiss. But he was living in it—too far gone in it to question his own feelings,

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or too much afraid of the depths he might discover. He followed her wayward course, thinking no woman had ever set her feet so lightly in the grass, or turned her head to look back with such a supple motion. Tamer of horses, orderer of men, captious dictator, he was caught in the crook of a little finger, the curl of an eyelash, the wave of a lock of hair. He saw her passing on soundless feet, from shadow to shadow, through light and light. She went like a wild thing, with movements so poised and beautifully balanced, they gave no sense of bodily weight. To capture her on the edge of day, at the moment when the fiery path would stretch out to them!

It was not to happen then; nor at mid-day, ghostly with accumulated mist of heat, when all the business of the house separated them, and the steady, undiverted eye of Mrs. Rader glanced between them. Not until the afternoon was tiring, with the languors of the whole hot day in its lap, did he lure her out again and down to the old spring well where she had led him first. Here her parole came to an end, and they were no longer laughing as at sunrise, but afraid of themselves and desperately in earnest.

"I thought we were to be friends—only friends, aren't we?" her cry sounded.

"Yes, friends if you like, but not only friends. We'd be enemies."

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“O, but I don’t want—”

The tide of her fears flowed to and fro, swung in, flung back again. The strength of the feeling made for fluctuation. Soul and body, which had kept such separate lives, each in its own fountain head, must toss together and struggle with each other before they could flow out in the one channel. Not at once would the current sweep smooth, even when, clasped and kissed, acknowledged lovers, though by no spoken word, they stood together, he looking down on her dark head.

Five days—and she was here in the middle of his life. She was in every direction in which he looked. The future he could not look into; the present filled all his horizon. The past was a dark alley. The harmless, natural life of the man who had lived there looked black. “What a brute I am!” he thought fearfully. “What does she see in me?”

She lifted her head, flung it back against his shoulder, and fixed her eyes on him a moment before she spoke. “Tell me something?” she asked.

“Anything.”

“What was it you wanted to ask me in the sewing-room, just as you came toward me?”

This startled him. “What made you think I wanted to ask anything?”

“Because you said, ‘Tell me’!”

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He had been unaware that he had spoken any of his thought, and he faced this idea with dismay. He had the opportunity he had wanted, yet now he looked upon it with disenchantment. He pushed it away. He did not want it now—the trouble of it, while her eyes were on his, and his hand beneath her knocking heart.

“I think I had the inspired presumption to begin to ask you if you loved me.” He said it, and in that moment it had become true to him. It seemed to him as if that had been the only thing he had ever wanted. He lost his sense of perspective—left the past behind.

Straight into the house they went from their tryst, and Carron was to recall for a long while the scene without a word which followed. Mrs. Rader was sitting in the dining-room in the half light, her body relaxed in one of the stiff uncompromising chairs, her hands lying palms up, half open, apart, the weariness of the work of all day in her lap. Her head drooped a little aside; her eyes gazed at destiny, resigned, immune to disappointment. To her her daughter went, coming behind her chair, put arms around her neck, laid a cheek against her mother's, and pressed it there in a dumb little caress. The poor woman, startled, half loosened the girl's

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arms, and looked up. It seemed she understood. The overplus of love had touched her cheek. She looked searchingly, imploringly into her daughter's eyes; but evidently this was all there was to be told. Youth knew no more, perhaps, of its own tumultuous heart; knew, perhaps, but selfishly hugged the secret; hugged it, perhaps, not selfishly but with a deeper understanding than experience has of the one brief season in a whole life when man and woman are loosed from all expediency and advisability—from reason altogether—and snatch their moment alone in their small field of flowers among the bristling thorns of the world. Youth, overriding, sure of himself, and proud, disdained to ask itself what it meant. The future to the two was as negligible as the past, or as the other souls living near them. They wanted to dream; to read each other's faces as open books, thousands of words on the pages, the same words a thousand times over; to float undisturbed on their tide of feeling; to gaze unaroused at their miracle; to ask, "How did we come together?" not, "Where are we going?"

CHAPTER XI

ET DEAM VIDIMUS

TO spring full-grown into the water to learn to swim, to mount full-grown into saddle to learn to ride, to leap for the first time into love, with the fixed convictions of experience and the brain of a skeptic—that is an experience which gives a man some moments of terror, lest he drown himself or be trampled before his heart begins to beat with the unimaginable joy. Carron, in the days of his mother's authority, had known none of the adolescent fancies. Without sentiment, late in developing, he had had small experience of women until his youth flung him into the plains. There he had known them—a few—owners of small properties, of hotels; of larger properties, of mines; or girls from he knew not where whom he had danced with in the heated balls. Their eyes had been keen and a little hard from continual defensive looking on the world. Their shrewd brains continually were pitted against man's in his arena; or did he venture toward theirs, it was a battle, and the thing was to get the best of him. Materialist, romanticist that he was, ex-

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pecting of woman all things he was not, Carron had found these as unsympathetic as certain New England exotics he remembered returning from Paris to Connecticut with their lovely eyes filled with the wonder of Parisian shops, the language of the city soft on their tongues, their hearts lodging houses for the latest foreign fancy.

It was this woman of the cultivated soul who had taken him. She knew how to make herself his ally, pet him out of his shynesses, laugh him out of his vanities, sit at his feet, draw out of the recesses of his mood shrewd music that he himself had not suspected. Five days they had had; and Love, who is fond of putting five days into five minutes, had showed them, if not herself from head to foot, at least the full splendor of her face. That instantaneous knowledge was of the heart. It had come first, which commonly is the final revelation. The hundred lesser knowledges of the mind remained to be discovered; and the charm of the days which followed was partly this becoming acquainted with each other backward.

The season of arranging the hotel was done, furniture shrouded and doors closed. The greater house assumed an intense repose; and Blanche, released from its tyrannies, became a creature of the out-of-doors. The later summer stood at the full above

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their heads. By night came the wider spreading gauzy fan of cloud, reaching from horizon to horizon; but the morning dispersed it, and at noon the sky showed a broad sheet of blue. The white grass was beginning to turn to gray, the trees black and laden with dust, the faint pools in the creek bed were shrunken dry, and every twig snapped under the foot like a spark. They saw, from the shelter of wooded hilltops, the hawk drop slowly, cutting the air, and come to his perch on the dying pine, and stand, his wings held out from his body for heat, his sharp tongue like a splinter in his mouth. They walked in the thick scent of endless pines and smelled, mixed with the resin, the sharper pungence of far-off forest fires. She led him by little unexpected paths to look on new corners of the world. They sat on heights and saw the ragged horizon of trees beyond, and beneath, the shelf of rock where perhaps a snake stirred, glistening.

She told him everything, from the shyest places of her thoughts, even the long kept fancies of the child—divine foolishnesses, unbelievable unworldlinesses. She pointed out to him again, at sunset, the little, playing, wild animals, rabbits and whisking chipmunks. She seemed to think, perhaps, they had souls. She brought back to his memory a certain morning beneath cedars; but this place they did not

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revisit. He recalled it, as he recalled the Sphinx's window, something belonging in past time; and he had no wish to lead her back to the discussion that had been theirs. No doubt she was in his hand now, an instrument easy to use; but she had ceased altogether to appear to him as an instrument. If he drew her on to talk now, his purpose was to watch the play of expression around her mouth, and the change in her eyes from alertness into dreams. His nature continued to fulfil itself. He continued to bend every faculty of mind and will to the pursuit of one thing, making everything else tributary to it. The only difference was that imperceptibly, in ways so gradual he was unaware of them, his object had changed. She had become the object.

Sometimes they raced the early moon—early, before the red had disappeared from the west—and stood beneath the Witch's Spindle silent, saw the bent form, like a human being, and felt themselves beneath the arms of fate. But never the later moon. She would not be out in the dark hours. Reminded of the floodtide of night; she found the excuse of the increasing veil of cloud; when that was gone then they might, perhaps. But each night it gathered a little deeper, and a chill came with it that whispered of winter, something to be thought of with a shiver in

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the small hours, and forgotten in the bright eye of day.

Sometimes they sat within the fringe of trees near where the carpet had laid, near enough to see the house—and it was a wonder if eyes from there did not see them—and laughed and talked nonsense; shamefully flattered each other, made fun of each other. He had been treated as a child and as a ruler at different times in his life, and he was treated as both at once now, but with a difference—a privileged child, humored, and when refused, refused with coaxing and a smile; an adored despot—deferred to, looked upon with eyes like a dove's for gentleness. Her gentleness was his continual amusement, and her incuriousness. She asked him at all seasons what he thought of her, sometimes what he thought of himself, sometimes of this or that person. But never of what he had done, of what life had been to him before he met her, or of any person who might have been in it, never troubled him with those questions of the past and the future with which human beings are wont to disturb the present. She had love, she held it and increased it. Sometimes, whether alone or with the other people around them, their eyes met, and he felt the knife of extreme happiness which is close to suffering. He thought it was because she was beautiful; not beau-

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tiful because of beauty, but because she was herself. Beauty now all depended on being Blanche. If it were she, then it was safe.

He learned a deal of her while they were among the other people—and this was often enough. He saw she was more ignorant of books than he; for sometimes, when they came in in the late afternoon, they took the way of the scholar's study, and entering flushed from the air, no doubt to him a living bucolic, they took at least half of his mind off of his volumes by pulling them about and skimming over them. She had never heard of Atalanta in Calydon before, but she thought Meleager was like Carron. She listened to the story of the Golden Fleece and found Carron in it. She pointed him out to himself in the pictures of the beautiful bas-reliefs of the Parthenon—one of the mounted figures—and embarrassed him by calling attention to its perfections. The two men spent some quiet twilights with her, her head closer to her father's than to Carron's, but close to both.

Once, across her hair, as she bent above Carlyle's thunders, the scholar sent a glance inquiring and anxious. Carron had almost nodded to reassure him, "Yes, I love her," when he remembered it was not of this Rader wanted to ask. The repeated appearance of the man and the woman to-

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gether, their harmonies and elations, the scholar might have perceived, as the ear takes in the rhythm of words, pleased, without reflection or deduction. It was of the other thing he questioned, which had brought the two men together, and which, strangely enough, still seemed a living issue in Rader's mind. The younger man looked it down. He would not acknowledge that such a thing existed, or ever had existed. He had even forgotten the promise he had made. He thought the scholar looked both relieved and disappointed. No doubt his imagination had been strongly touched; he had thought to see some incident, like an old, heroic tale, played out before his eyes.

But there, also, was his loyalty to the girl. She seemed to stand for a great deal to him, perhaps for an embodiment of that theoretic beauty he had named once as being the most real thing in all the world; perhaps for the embodiment of a simpler, more human thing, his own youth. There was a likeness between them. Even the outward resemblance was traceable, the same quick, inquiring turn of the head, and the same dreamy eye, though it dreamed upon a different ideal, the scholar's was upon the abstract; the girl's upon the concrete—a terrible thing to desire and to expect to find. She watched her father's face more than she did the

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beautiful pages of his "Spectators." She spoke of him to Carron, one afternoon, as they walked on into the house, through the long passage.

"He gets lost in them," she said, meaning the books, "just as we do in the hills. He forgets everything, even to go to bed. He has had beautiful books from the time when he could buy such things, and mother would never let him part with one of them."

"Why, did he want to?"

"O, of course not. I meant when we were so terribly—poor; and he could have sold even a few for a good deal of money, mother would never even ask him. She did everything, rather than that. She used to patch our shoes herself. She loves him terribly. She would do anything for him."

"And he?" Carron prompted.

Blanche shrugged, and shook her head. "He is fond of us, of course, but, well—we are not books, that is our shortcoming. They're more to him than any person is. It is hard to understand." She gathered her forehead. "Mother doesn't, but she accepts it."

Such facts fell quaintly from her mouth, bare facts, observed of people. She showed the same direct comprehension in regard to certain other persons whom he became indirectly acquainted with, her many correspondents. These were people who

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had stayed at the hotel for a space, and been caught in the woven net of sweetness and careless disdain. The letters, which were brought up now by the boy George—by the elder Ferrier never—included usually one or two for her—letters, most of which bore the postmarks of cities in the state; but sometimes one showed an Italian stamp or a Cuban, or that its journey was from the far north. She would smile faintly over the open page; then look up with a laugh to read him a line, or give him a sketch of the writer. This lady was living at Nice. She was trying to decide whether it would be safe to divorce her husband, because there was a chance that, after all, her friend might not marry her.

This man was a retired seaman, who had made his money in smuggling opium. His letter began: "Miss Rader: Miss," which delighted her, and was a prospectus of the writer's perfections and virtues with a guarded query as to the possibility of marriage. At the idea of becoming a smuggleress—as she put it—Blanche fell into such laughter that she found it difficult to make Carron understand that the writer of a certain third letter was a quite eminent geologist, who wanted very much another specimen of a stone. He felt sure she must remember it. It was in the middle of a rocky ledge, down a declivity, just over the hill from the hotel. She could, he said, procure it

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easily by being lowered a little distance—ten feet. There would not be much danger.

“Father wouldn’t see anything wrong with that point of view,” she declared. For herself, she seemed to find it exceedingly amusing. She seemed to like these people, even the lady at Nice of whom Carron had serious doubts, but she did not look upon them as friends. There was a line drawn there. It was the rare thing about her that she could live in the mixed crowd of humanity, like it, have so few illusions about it, and in the midst of it keep herself so far off, and cherish so intensely ideals and illusions all her own. He noted sensitiveness, almost morbid, with which she assumed her own nature to everything that grew and lived, without sound, or without a human voice. Deeply and ineradicably secretive she was, and afraid lest any unsympathetic touch or thought come near what she loved! She had turned cold eyes on Ferrier. Her tolerant friendship had disappeared, and she drove him away from her presence with icy words and looks. Carron, to whom this man had never been more than a vague figure on the horizon, worth nothing but a little pity, ventured to inquire.

She shrugged, shook her head, and waived the question.

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He sounded her. "You don't dislike George."

"George is different." She was very clear on this point. "He hasn't a brain, you see. He feels you don't like him, and like an animal, he's afraid of you. But Bert doesn't like you, because he wants something." She flushed a little with anger, and Carron dropped this delicate question for another. But upon the question that involved her mother, Blanche was not cold. Hostility mixed with affection is hot. "She doesn't trust you," the girl declared with darkening eyes. "I don't expect anything of Bert, but she ought to feel as I do about you—yet she doesn't. She says things about you. It makes me feel hot, as if she had struck me, and for the moment I hate her."

But her temper could run further than that, he was to find out, when he tried to urge her one evening into the little balcony where their first tryst had been kept. She resisted, refused, pressed for a reason, shivered. "It is rotten, condemned. It may tear away from the house at any minute, even with nothing on it."

He was struck with admiration and horror of this frantic child.

"I thought you didn't like me—and I knew I liked you too much!—and, just then, I didn't care what

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became of us!" she explained. "You don't know how I have lain awake over the thought of what might have happened to you! I am dreadful once I am started."

"You may risk my neck," he told her plainly, "but not your own. And you are to be decent to your mother. She's not having a bit of a good time of it, and she may be right about me for all you know."

"She isn't," Blanche said positively. "But I will be nice if you want me to," she added with sudden docility; "I'd rather do anything than make you angry."

He thought this was a pretty speech, but he discovered on the same day the full truth of it. They had been walking over the turn of the hill, toward the barn, going for the horses, when the figure of the boy, George, came into sight below them, among the trees. It was some days since Carron had seen him. He had kept away from the house, was not even to be found when the diligent Mrs. Rader wanted him, and Blanche searched. There had been anxiety in the girl's look then and now there was a brightening as she waved her hand. The creature threw high both of his, streaked with earth; then began to come with bounds upward, through the trees. Like a dog, foolish with the

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joy of seeing his master, he came straight toward her as though he would have flung her over, but, instead, flung himself upon her and falling on his knees, clasped his arms around her waist, and hung there, dropping back his head to look up worshipfully.

Laughing she put her hands on his arms. Thus she might have laid them on the dog's head. But Carron was quick. He seized the boy's wrists. The creature clung fast giving Carron an upward look, the dull, glazed eye of fear; but the man unlocked his fingers with a hard twist and plucking him off as if he had been a slug, tossed him backward, until he rolled a little down the hill.

"What are you doing?" she cried. "What is the matter?"

"Don't let him touch you again!" Carron could hardly speak. The sight of the half-witted thing hanging upon her thickened his tongue and sent the red sparks before his eyes.

The boy was picking himself up, dazed and terrified, from the ground. "You have hurt him!" she lamented, and made a dart forward. "He didn't mean any harm! He does that like a child!"

Carron had her by the shoulder, and pulled her back. "Don't go near him, do you hear! Let him go!"

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The figure of the boy, half running, half creeping was growing smaller among the trees. "How could you do that! I am the only thing in the world he isn't afraid of."

"He is a beast! I can't endure to see him near you!"

"He's not." She had an anger of her own. "He is a great deal less of one than some men with brains."

Carron shut his teeth.

"Do you mean me?"

She stared, indignant and astonished. "How can you think such a thing?"

"Very easily. You give him privileges I've never taken!"

"Oh," she wailed. She turned with the air of leaving him for the end of the world, took a few precipitate steps, and leaned against a tree trunk, hiding her face, shaking with nervous sobs, without a tear.

Sullenly he approached her. The storm had poured on him suddenly out of clear heavens. "If I had known that creature mattered so much to you, I wouldn't have interfered," he said. "Stop crying! Do you hear?" The sound of those sobs was terrible to him.

At his touch she released the tree and clasped him

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instead, clinging with hands which were a revelation of nervous strength. "It isn't on account of him!" she murmured, "it's you! You didn't mean it. He has not a brain. You can't understand that, I know; and you, so kind always, always so gentle, so good—O better than I am, much better—how could you say such a thing? How could you think I would mean such a thing? It hurts, it hurts like fire! You didn't mean it?"

He swore that he had not, that she might have anything she wanted; that he loved her, that he would be anything she pleased to think him; only stop sobbing like that and everything would be all right. He did not know what he was saying. Misery and happiness filled him at thus being clung to, trusted, believed in as an unshakable, invulnerable god. Outwardly he reassured her. Inwardly he was crying, "Lord knows where we are going! Lord knows how this will end!"

She seemed to have furnished him with her own virtues, with all virtues which have been known since man was born. When he was with her they seemed almost possible to him. But when he thought of it in the times they were apart, he felt afraid. What if she should discover that he was only a common man, not as she had told him, under the cedars, "not different?" A strange girl! Notions a man

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had never heard of in other women. Never could tell in what direction he might hurt her next, or delight her. She had none of the exactions, common to woman, made no bargains with him, was ready to run to meet him from any distance; yet, suddenly, with nothing to warn him, he would find himself floundering in fresh mysteries, in inexhaustible reserves. He had supposed the distance between them was but a hand's breadth, and behold, a dark continent.

Still, through barrens of egoism, around pitfalls of their natures, dangers of which they were unaware, they drifted nearer together. To become as one person, to be done for ever with the possibility of differing! Thus love, with her mirage of the perfect solvent.

Restless, wanting more than he had in the present, not wanting to look into the future, Carron lived in chaos, without a thought of to-morrow. Half their joy had been in their freedom, their wildness, their detachment from the world. That institution by which the world is populated—he had never even considered it enough to scorn it. He was the last of human creatures to think of himself as mated, but he felt the approach of an end to summer, an end to an idyl, a sharpening of its sweetness; and, like a wounding edge, separation.

CHAPTER XII

THE SOD ON THE PANE

ON the eighth day of Carron's idyl, Beetles the dog became ill. Whether his propensity for swallowing foreign substances—some venomous member of the tribe of insects to which he was devoted, from which he had received his name—had brought the sickness and the fever, was impossible to tell. He lay on a little piece of sacking on the side porch, and Blanche hung over him as though he had been an ailing infant. But her hands shook when she tried to get water between his teeth. She drenched his poor head in wet cloths that would not stay cold. In her anxiety she made the wretched animal more wretched. Carron, gravely squatted on his heels, prescribed for the case and took it into his own hands. Sick dogs he had handled occasionally, as well as horses and men. He hung up a piece of wet sacking where the draft would blow through it coolly upon the forlorn creature, and he sat through intervals of a blazing afternoon, patiently putting cracked ice on Beetles' head, or, with hands

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deft enough to overcome any difficulty, prying open his mouth and pouring in medicine. He was indefatigable, when even Blanche had relinquished hope. He hated to see things die. He had a deep and reverential worship of life, of flesh and blood vivid under the sun. Death was the pitiful calamity. It was more than that; to Carron it was the evil of life.

He persuaded Blanche to go to bed early, with the fiction that he noticed an improvement in Beetles' case, when in fact he noticed nothing of the sort. He had the gloomiest expectations. He rose preternaturally early the next morning with the intention of being on the ground first if the catastrophe had occurred. To the first glance Beetles looked inanimate enough; but at the sound of the step, the ears lifted a little, and the tail moved with inquiring interest in life. Carron examined his patient and found him convalescent. He covered the little creature with a piece of blanket, since the morning was cool—then lit a pipe and walked about in the open space through which the drive made its loop. He felt absurdly happy. With the empty feeling of before-breakfast, the smoke of the pipe, the fine, light, out-of-door air he grew a little poetic, looked up at the façade of the new hotel and perceived a likeness in it to Mrs. Rader. It was spare, a little disapproving, but not in the least forbidding, with an exact

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sense of its position in society and its duty toward the world at large, and for these things a deep respect. Also the little vertical apertures for light, in the garret, gave a faint expression of anxiety. The old wing was Mr. Rader—not classic enough, but elderly, individual, unexpected, and having the courage of its convictions. There was nothing like Blanche, unless it were the pale, cool light and hot pools of sun in the pine forest, but she was not only the near light and shade, in which a man could rest and be stimulated by the sharp, uncloying sweetness. She was also the inexhaustible blue arch of the sky.

Whistling between his teeth, the cold pipe held fast in them, the cloud of pretty thoughts blowing through the upper chambers of his mind, it occurred to his baser perception that the pine-needles had drifted a good deal in the last week. He hunted out a rake from the tool house and set himself to work, drawing back the brown drift to the edges of the clearing, and then into separate little cocks with a good collar of bare earth around each. He remembered how, with the autumn, little pyres like these had been set blazing down New England streets; how the boys had leaped them, and the girls, in greater danger because of skirts. He thought of how Blanche would have leaped; with no fear of the fire, with only the fear of not leaping highest

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and best. He could see how she would look, a child with rough, streaming curls, and the light of competition in her eye. She would have permitted no boy but himself to be her better!

Gradually he had worked his way around the clearing, and around that point where the drive turned from it to descend the hill. The road was visible for several rods below him. He was more upon it now than the drive. Linnets crossed it, and rabbits; and presently a man came into sight around the bend and approached. This person appeared as a midget of the landscape, a little dab of humanity among trees, like those figures painters introduce, for the sake of showing the superiority of the trees; thus he seemed, until he had come far enough to stand opposite and fix his attention on Carron. Then, perforce, the figure was resolved into its separate identity, one that had been met and known thrice, each time under circumstances rather odd and which had scarcely recommended themselves.

Carron nodded to him, wishing him good morning. He had no renewal of antagonism. The disparity in strength was too great. This fellow, Ferrier, appeared not to thrive in the early morning hours. He looked pinched and hugged his arms as if he were chilly, and Carron revolved the problem



Carron prescribed for the case

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as to whether there was any way of putting him in possession of a decent coat for the winter, at the same time not letting the fellow suffer in his pride. That was as threadbare as his clothes—no doubt as sensitive to strain. The man was watching him rather longer than an interest in the occupation of sweeping leaves seemed to warrant.

"I think the people are down-stairs by this time," Carron observed, offering the only piece of information he could imagine Ferrier's wanting of him.

"Are they?" the voice coming suddenly, sounded harsh. Carron looked up, observed him for the first time clearly, saw the man planted there irresolutely. He wore bravado like a cloak of gossamer. Agitation was apparent beneath it. "I didn't think they'd be up just yet. Old man Rader said you always were up first. I thought—" He seemed to decide that this was not the way to begin it. "I've something to say to you," he started again with a louder and more determined voice. "Would you mind walking down the road a little way?"

Carron let his rake rest in a surprised hand. The voice, the face, the request were out of tune with the hour. "Why not talk here?"

"I'd rather not. Besides," he gave it with quite an air, "this business is to your advantage."

"Indeed? Then we will stay here."

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Ferrier narrowed his lips. He glanced at the hotel. All that was visible was the blank side of the greater house, with every shade drawn. "Doesn't make any difference to *me*," he remarked, throwing an accent on the last word, but he seemed a little taken aback. He made a meditative half-circle in the pine-needles with his heel, then looked up at Carron from under his brows. "I was only going to say, you seem to be wasting a lot of time."

"Yes?" Carron had the gift of not talking. He saw occasion for exercising it now.

"I told you you would," Ferrier volunteered. His adversary merely looked at him, only too ready to let the conversation fall. Ferrier gathered himself together. "I know how you are! You'll never help a fellow an inch with what he's got to say!" He wavered, summoning his last resolution. "The fact is, I've thought over what you asked me the other night about a certain matter and I've decided to accept your proposition."

Carron opened cold wide eyes of astonishment. The past, so little past, flung up to him in this man's voice roused in him intense distaste. He had no wish to recall it. He did not want to remember that he had ever made a proposition to Ferrier—and such a proposition! He indulged a vague speculation as to what the man wanted. More money? If so, he

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was asking for it in a bad way. Carron put his hand meditatively into his pocket. "I don't know what you are talking about," he said.

"You know mighty well," the other replied in the unpleasant tones of the confidant. "I mean I know where the horse is; I'll show you, and I'll show you straight whenever you like—" he paused and then shot the full splendor of the proposition—"for no further consideration!"

This was an unexpected turn of the affair. Carron could not restrain a smile, but he felt a little puzzled.

"You don't mean she has shown you?" The keen pointed glint of panic looked out of Ferrier's eyes. "No, no! I know she hasn't," he added quickly. "She wouldn't. She never will! You'd better take my proposition. It's the only chance you'll get."

Carron reached for the rake. "Ferrier," he said patiently, "I don't want it."

"But I do know," the man passionately insisted. "I know what I've seen. It isn't a fake. If a horse is what you want, there's no horse like him in the world!" He took hold of Carron's arm. "I'm telling you the truth, and I won't go back on you this time, I swear! I give you my word of honor!"

"Yes, yes, of course," Carron said rather sooth-

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ingly, "I believe you, certainly I do. But you see I don't want the horse; and wouldn't take it as a gift. There's no use talking, that's the end of it."

Ferrier let go of Carron's sleeve. It appeared he had been sure of his cast. His trembling had not been at thought of failure, but at the peril involved in success. Now he looked white. There was a slight sucking in of the nostrils. This fellow with the small, hawk look about his nose, perhaps had the hawk wish in his heart to peck, but lacked blood courage. "Then what are you staying for?"

Evidently they had reached the real issue of the case. Carron suffered illumination. "That," he said, stooping to pick up his rake, "is none of your business."

"If you think you're going to get her by staying," Ferrier breathlessly began, "you're fooled! You can't!" But his anguish told how little certain he was. "You can't, I tell you! No one can take her away from me! O, God!" The weight of his fear seemed to fall on him all at once. He sat down on the bank and took his head in his hands.

Carron looked at him with an embarrassed and compassionate eye. "Look here, Ferrier," he murmured, "there's no use in our talking—better drop it."

Ferrier was on his feet again. "Yes, we'll drop

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it! When you go!" That sound of pity in Carron's voice seemed to be more than he could bear. "I'll drop it, if you'll get out this day and this minute."

The man who had been struggling to leave this harassing conversation and resume his mild occupation with dead leaves let the rake fall with a clatter. "Who directed me here?" he demanded. "Now what are you whimpering about?"

"Never mind that!" Ferrier declared shrilly. "I didn't direct you here for this reason. I thought you were a decent kind. I didn't expect you to come here, and take a girl and try to—"

Carron made the quick step of the boxer toward him. The fellow choked the word and dodged. "You've got your chance to go peaceably and take the horse," he stammered—"or stay and you'll be kicked out in twenty-four hours. I'll tell them!" His voice began to rise as if it tried to reach the height of some appalling warning. "I'll tell Mrs. Rader."

Carron began to laugh. There was no sneer in the long sound of mirth. That threat had struck him as particularly funny. "All right," he said cheerfully. "Go ahead. You've my entire permission. Suppose we go up together now and you tell her about it." He looked at Ferrier with a bantering eye.

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Ferrier's face was a peculiarly unpleasant dull red. "Do you think I don't mean it?"

"I think you mean every word—and I mean every word. Whenever you like; it's the same to me." He shouldered his rake and walked away up the drive.

He knew well enough that Ferrier would not follow him then and there. If he had supposed that he would have been nervous enough. The man could not tell Mrs. Rader more about himself and Blanche than she already knew or suspected; but he might put the business in an ugly light; considering his caliber and his state of mind he might say anything, and who could tell if Mrs. Rader might not believe him? He walked rapidly, amusement still overflowing his eyes at the idea of Mrs. Rader as an avenging deity, one of whom Blanche would be in terror. Ferrier had been impertinent to the last degree; yet it was strange the way he could rouse no feeling but a sort of pity; and upon this occasion Carron was aware of a warmer and more positive emotion toward him—gratitude! Instead of hindering, the man had given him a push in the right direction. That morning Carron had been fancying the past and finding Blanche there. Now he had had a sharp impetus forward to the edge of the future. He looked into it and saw an actual world.

Reaching the house he found a check to the im-

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mediateness of his resolution. Mrs. Rader and Blanche were already busy in the sewing-room, so Rader, solitary at the breakfast table, informed him. He inquired of the scholar what time the stage went down to Beckwith. It was at about six-thirty, Rader said; and from Beckwith again it passed at about noon. Carron took a pencil from his pocket and wrote on the blank back of an envelope:

“Pay storage on the stuff, pack it, and freight it, and go home on the afternoon train.” He signed this, and sat considering it. That was the wind-up—that was the end of the quest. That would go down to Esmeralda Charley to-morrow morning. He looked up and saw the scholar, with his attentions lifted from his book, regarding him with a pondering eye. The young man was apprehensive. He didn’t want to be questioned now. He didn’t want to be questioned at all. That was not the way he intended the thing should go. He left the dining-room, and walked around the veranda to the sewing-room window. Here he maneuvered a little to avoid Mrs. Rader’s, and at the same time to attract Blanche’s attention. His beckonings made her shake her head.

“By and by—when I have a chance,” she formed the words to him with her lips, and with that he had to be content. He spent some long hours, and

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filled them only with his own impatience and the setting alight of his heaps of pine needles in the clearing. At last, at noon, she came, saying she had only a minute.

"You'll have to give me a minute," he said, "and a little more. I have something to say to you," and hailed her out.

On the side of the clearing, opposite the house, and in plain sight of it, they sat down beneath the fringe of trees. Below them flicked pointed flames, or pale blue threads rose straight in the still air, making it more misty. The smoke of the little fires was in their nostrils, the odor of the sacrifice to winter. "I want you to do me a very great favor," Carron said.

"Yes." She was prompt. Had no hesitations.

"Tell your mother all about how the matter stands with us," he said. Then, as she fixed him with doubtful eyes, "You know—tell her that I've got to go back to the ranch at the end of this week, and you are going too. Aren't you?" he added, with a sudden edge of anxiety at finding her silent. Her breast rose in long breaths. Her head, inclined slightly forward, looked down upon the fires. "You knew that you were, didn't you?" he insisted, trying to get her averted eye.

"O, yes!" She turned to him and looked at him,

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as though once more she realized, with astonishment, how well she knew him. "But now that it has come, I—" She seemed to strain at a leash, aware perhaps for the first time how he had entrapped her fleet youth.

"It has come so soon. Can't we be like this a little longer?"

"But we can't. The end of the week, perhaps before, I've got to be off." He mused. "I suppose it will be rather a job, telling your mother. This is just what she has been afraid of."

Blanche laughed, and laughed again. "No, you goose! Don't you see?" Apparently he did not. "We have understood it so well from the very first that this was to be for ever and ever! We forgot that she might not know it."

He was blank.

"How stupid you are!" she said affectionately. "Mother has thought all along that you were a sad deceiver."

He took a rapid glance at the past. "Do you mean to tell me she couldn't see that I was the dust under your feet?"

"You didn't act like it."

"I felt like it so hard, I never thought of anything else. The poor lady!" He was contrite enough, even a little shocked, but couldn't help feel-

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ing amused. Mrs. Rader's idea of the situation struck him as a little theatric. "Then you must tell her now, immediately."

Presented with the practical proposition, Blanche began to show signs of wishing to evade it. "But she is so busy and she hates to be told things when she's busy."

"Well, then, as soon as she finishes."

"Oh, dear, I hate to. She will say we ought to wait—that we haven't known each other long enough."

"But we won't and we have. The short time is a distinct advantage. You can tell her that."

"No, you do it."

Carron would not have made that flippant remark to Mrs. Rader for any consideration, and he suspected the wicked girl knew it. "I have to see your father," he said with dignity.

She looked at him quaintly. "O, that will just be fun! I can't imagine father under such circumstances. What do you suppose he will say?"

"He will say that like all sinners, I have great hopes of Heaven."

They used frivolous, mirthful words, but their eyes said serious things to each other, and half spoken sentences were forgotten on their lips. She was the first to remember the time. "Oh, how long

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have we been here? And mother may be wanting me!" She fled; but at the veranda steps, she stopped, conscience smitten. "We forgot all about him!" she said.

"Who?"

"Beetles!" At the sound of his name the dog turned his head with lifted ears, and weakly moved his tail.

"He's all right. He's coming along nicely." Carron examined his patient with gratification. "Tomorrow he'll be on his feet."

She fell on her knees beside the terrier, took his head between her hands, murmured reproaches of herself, and endearing words, promises of joy for the future—she would even let him chase rabbits. Then, springing up, she flung her arms around Carron and whirled him. "What shall I do for you, who have done so much? It must be something very wonderful."

"You are going to do something more than wonderful," he answered.

"O, but over and above that," she insisted.

"There is nothing."

She let him have his way with his conviction. It was hers too. She went, her feet rushing on the stair. Never before, perhaps never afterward, did they sound quite that wild, light music of joy.

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He thought of it in his room that night, after the whole house was still. Like a refrain of delight it recurred between the soberer sentences of his discussion with Rader.

Blanche's prophecy had been fulfilled. It had been fun telling the scholar. "What do you want to do that for?" he had demanded of the young man who had announced himself as wanting to marry his daughter. Carron, who two weeks ago, would have put the same question to any acquaintance, had been able immediately to give reasons as to why he was wiser than all men. The scholar had shaken his head. "But what is she going to say to your profession?"

Here he had struck a point truly; but Carron had ridden it down. He had snapped his fingers. "O, what difference will that make now? She won't have to see anything of it, and—well, if she really can't endure it, of course I can give it up."

"Give it up!" the scholar had echoed in stupefaction.

"Why not?" Carron had argued, feeling a little on the defensive. "There are plenty of other things I can do."

Rader had looked at him silently for some seconds. "And you really have given up your first idea?"

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"You mean what I came here for? It doesn't seem worth worrying her about."

"Why need she be worried about it?" Rader had answered with such a peculiar significance that Carron looked at him in astonishment. "The horse," the scholar proceeded, unfolding his meaning, "is only an idea to her, isn't it? She has no desire to possess it. She only wants to see it while it's here. She knows that presently it will disappear, go back, perhaps, to the plains." He looked dreamily at the horse-breaker's hands. "Now, suppose you wanted the horse; and suppose you knew where it was, and just how to get it; you could easily take it, couldn't you, and she would never be any the wiser?"

Carron was rather struck now, when he remembered it. The old theorizer had accurately worked the matter out; and certainly he had hit the nail on the head! It seemed the scholar and he had rather changed places since the first time they had talked in the study. He could laugh about it now in his room. But he had felt a little tormented while Rader had probed the old passion. He realized it was there yet; but it was there as a background for the new, young, more fiery passion, which he had not grown up with and become accustomed to, but which had seized him in his full strength, melted him

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and translated him with its wonder and with its promises. This held other thought at a distance. He heard clearer than anything else the joyous running of Blanche's feet. He blew out his candle, since already a brightness, which sifted into his room from without, made the pointed flames pale. Upon his floor and all across the wall lay marvelous tracery of black and silver, a perfect mimic—lacking only color—of the trees outside. He was standing in the enchanted semblance of a wood. He remembered that for the eight past days this brocading had been gray. He drew a curtain aside. The fan of cloud, that coquetry of the moon, was furled and gone; the sky stood deep and clear above the pines. The moon's self was not high enough yet to be visible, since to be visible from where he stood she must reach nearly mid-heaven, but her radiance was upon everything.

The circle of tall trees solemnly surrounding the clearing made a wreath of shadows like velvet, and all that was not shadow was drenched in clear white fire. Between the clouded and the clear moonlight there was such difference as between beauty clothed and beauty unveiled. The sight brought him thoughts, strange and beautiful past the telling.

He let the curtain fall, and turned back. The

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hour was scant eleven o'clock, but the house was still. He was not tired, not sleepy. He was preternaturally wide-awake. There seemed to be an owl on the edge of the clearing, complaining in its deep chest voice. The body of a bat struck his window-screen. The creatures all came out with full moon. There it was again, that sound, a swish and a soft thud. This time it flew higher and hit the glass. His coat half off, he turned and looked attentively. In a moment, up-shooting from below, plop, the small, dark object came a third time. He realized now what was happening. Some one had thrown a sod of earth lightly against his window-pane.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

HE went quickly forward and pushed the curtain wide. Down in the angle of black cast by the outside stair, the figure of Blanche Rader was standing. Her body emerged from shadow into moonlight like a flower to the surface of water. Knees and the sweep of skirts were hidden. Shoulders and arms shone clear. The uncovered throat, and the face in its dark wreath of hair were like silver. She was leaning a little back, with limber waist, hands clasped behind her head, looking up. The mischief of middle night was in her face, subtle and scarcely smiling.

Grasping the window-frame in both hands, as if by such means he could keep the sight before him, the skeptic gazed. His heart, which had been full of her, might have prompted his eyes to summon the vision. It was but the flower of the time, the proper center of this pale flood of beauty, far too perfectly in tune with his thoughts to be real. His doubts must have been thick in his face, for sud-

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denly she laughed. He saw the gleam of white teeth and light dancing in shadowed eyes, but heard not a sound. She skipped backward a few paces, stretched her hands toward the window, drew them back toward herself, fingers pointing to her bosom; flung them wide, fingers pointing around the clearing. This language of gesture, spirited and wayward, declared the actual woman. If anything were needed to reassure him beyond doubt it was the stamped foot and the violently shaken head by which she still commanded his presence at the window, when he would have left it for the outer door. Once more pointing at herself, she showed him with stroking gestures how she wore a coat, a queer little brown thing, a dryad garment, pale as the old bark of a tree. The air was mild, warm, mocking such a precaution; but a coat, or a thousand coats! if that was all she imposed to reach her!

He put on outer garments with a mind in abeyance. His senses thought, and were inspired. Opening the door the breath of night rushed upon his face to welcome him, sweet and unexpected as the woman's seeking him. From behind the wire screens it had looked as a picture. Now it was intimate, and whispered of actual possibilities. The voice of the pines flowed all round him, murmuring like a stream underground. He looked over the

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edge of the little balcony. No form, no face, either of woman or spirit. Nothing stirred in the clearing, nor in the angle made by the outside stair. The black likeness of it which the moon flung upon the ground, was as deep and opaque as any well; but even water shows faintly the forms beneath it. He leaned down over the rail and spoke her name under his breath. Not a sound replied. Feeling bewitched he descended the stair. Reaching the foot of it, immediately his fingers were grasped by a cool palm and he was drawn into the shadow.

Plunged into darkness with her he could see her. Her eyes looked black as the sky and radiant with excitement. The moon had taken the color from her lips. They were pale as an elf's. She took him by both arms and held him off from her, looking at him up and down with a bright enigmatic gaze; but whether it demanded to know of him if he was indeed the greatest of men in the world, or whether it only spoke to him of the mystery of night, or some mystery beyond the night, it was impossible to tell. She laid a forbidding finger on his mouth when he would have kissed her. He tried to clasp her, but slippery as quicksilver she retreated before him.

"Come—this way," she murmured, and pulled him after her.

Half running he followed, keeping close under

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the piazza rail where the only shadow extended was a narrow band like a ribbon, past the steps where the first night she appeared to him as an arm extended out of darkness, and round the corner of the old wing, coming out before the front of the greater house.

"Where are we going?" he whispered.

"Sh-h-h!" She clung to the wall, holding them both still, listening. It was only the owl that had spoken. She put her lips close to Carron's ear. "Follow me around the edge of the clearing. Do exactly as I do. Don't speak."

The hotel with all its windows looked blank and dead as the face of a rock. It buttressed them from the live part of the house. In its shelter she ran fearlessly, but with remarkably light noiseless steps, and slipped into the trees on the left side of the drive. Here he had ado to keep her in sight. Now the white back of a neck gleamed, now a hand shone, laid an instant against a tree trunk; but chiefly he tracked her as an animated shadow gliding rapidly among shadows that were still, and leaving a waving of branches in its wake. She slid down the bank with a cascading of earth into the road just at the point where it turned from the clearing to descend the hill; and they stood together in the same place where Carron and Ferrier had stood that morning.

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"What an awful lot of noise you make!" she whispered. "Sound carries in this air."

"I can't help it, I'm not a feather. If you would only keep still a minute—"

She flitted just beyond his reach—seemed to be there already without having run away.

"Look over there," she said, pointing downward through the trees. "That way you will see the moon."

The moon! What was the moon to him, unless the reflection of her? What had the whole earth been to her only yesterday but a place in which to stand and be embraced? Now she could look at a bright spot above a scallop of trees with eyes that had forgotten him. Yet, after they had swept the trees, the ground, the sky, they returned again, as to the center of a circle, to his face.

"Are you coming?"

"You mad woman, where are you taking us?" She answered with a pressure of the hand, and began to take dancing steps, as if what her eyes saw around her was music to her. She moved in front of him with darting motions, now to this side of the road, now to the other. House and clearing disappeared behind them. A fretwork of white and black streamed upon their faces. They passed the gateposts that rose upon their progress like phantoms.

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The thought of the old spring well came to him. She was leading him there, perhaps; but past the place where the path turned off she went without a look toward it. As the descent grew sharper her dancing steps became a run. Not, it seemed, in apprehension of anything that might pursue, but wild with pleasure, like a child dashing out of an open door. They raced each other, swinging around turns, losing caution on the firm road, ceasing to think of feet, seeming to fly. Little creatures darted across their way. A fox dashing in front of them showed them round eyes of gold and left them laughing.

The fork of the road brought a momentary halt. There was more black here than light. The fancy he had had when he looked at the walls of his room had become real. They were together among a tracery of forest branches. Yet these things were never as they were imagined. She was not. He could not touch her. Her hand slipped from him like light or water.

"Won't they know we have gone?" he asked.

"Well, we *will* have gone," she answered, and laughed. The inconsequent, reckless note made him uneasy, yet it excited him. She made him feel as though there were no house anywhere, no brains to be flushed, nor hearts to be cold, whatever might become of the two in the hollow of the hills, in the

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night. She began to walk rapidly up the road, which stretched like a thin white wand between high walls of trees.

The frolic of the woodland deity seemed to have settled into an intense purpose. It was carrying her forward at a pace that did not slacken to the crest of the slope. Here they dipped over into a dimple of land. Upon the right, below the road, he saw the mossy roof he had noticed when he rode back from his adventure of the Sphinx. The wagon track which led downward looked clearer than it had by day. Without hesitation Blanche turned into it.

Carron halted, astonished. "Where are you going?"

She hung on her heel, and pointed on.

"Whose house is that?"

"Ferriers'." She had scarcely pronounced the word before she had turned and disappeared under the low hanging branches of the pines.

Mystified, angry, wondering what madness she had in her head, he ran after. She was in the doorway before he could reach her. There was only a narrow space of earth some four feet broad between house and cañon, and the trees stood at its edge, reaching arms across it like a roof. The sagged, unpainted house front looked dark and disinhabited. Blanche made a warning gesture for silence, and

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began moving cautiously down the clearing, keeping close under the windows as she had when they had passed the hotel. Past the door, and past the corner of the house, and to the farther edge of the clearing. Here she turned, smiled, and touched Carron with propitiatory fingers. "He isn't there," she whispered. "He is in town for the night. I arranged it," and, without waiting for further explanation, stepped over a low ledge of rock as sharp as the edge of a table.

From here an empty, almost barren, stretch of hillside, scattered stones and wider scattered pines, extended downward to a solid mass of trees. Beyond these the dark heads of the Sugar Loafs stood against a bright sky. There was no time for amazement, scarcely time to think how to find footing, if he were to keep up with her. She kept a good three yards in front, stopping now and then to scan what lay below, but seeming never at a loss. She was aiming, it appeared, for the formidable black encampment in the cañon, and aiming for one spot in its impregnable front. It was austere and large enough to awe even a woodsman's eye, seeing it for the first time, but the girl approached it with the assurance of one treading known ground. She did not hesitate even when she stood on the verge of it. No break in the trees was visible, from beneath their

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feet, but a trail unwound like a clue, a white plummet dropped into the cañon.

"It's rather rough," she said and reached him her hand. She said it as she would have said "The back stairs are steep." They plunged, and were swallowed from each other's eyes.

He had started boldly as the leader, but presently imperceptibly it was she who drew him. He had the enchanting and perilous sensation of being led by an unseen presence. The well of darkness was without a gleam. Two senses bound her to him in oblivion: the sense of touch—five fingers told him she was there—and the ear which caught sound—a sound both of life and of mortality—the sound of feet stumbling and catching hold upon earth. Sometimes a sweep of branches, inhuman fingers, brushed his face. Presently she began to murmur to him, "Better slide here. Reach up and catch hold of the branches. Look out for the rocks there. Keep to the left side here."

The smell of the cañon rose to them, night dew upon leaf mold. Then came the rift in the trees, the ripple of silver, the stream of the moon where the stream of water flowed in spring. They had reached the bottom of the cañon. "Step on the stones," she advised, "the sand is boggy." He had plunged a leg in almost to the knee before he could stop him-

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self; and, as he recovered footing, the cluck of the sand, the sensation of being pulled, brought up another moment under the beating sun at the foot of a cliff.

Across the ford they were upon a more level way. On this side the rise of the land from the creek was gradual, and the trail, made by cattle to the water, was easy to follow. It drifted along at the foot of the hills, growing fainter as the trees grew thin. Fifteen minutes, and he heard a sound his ear recognized, often heard at such an hour of night—the trampling to and fro of feet, and tossing of branches as if restless bodies moved among them. “There are horses!” he said.

“Yes.” The sentence fell unsurprised. She looked down significantly, and by the glance drew his attention to the fact that she wore her riding skirt. A few steps farther and swinging stirrups, bright eyes under forelocks, and glossy flanks appeared. He recognized Blanche’s mustang, drooping like a stoic—but this other creature that was threshing among the pine leaves—could that be the chestnut—his mare? Early in the evening he had left her safe in stable. Here she stood in the wilderness, blanketed and tied to a dead pine. She flung up a startled head—and, seeing Carron, whinnied. He ran to her, felt her, and found her right

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enough, though very impatient, and turned his amazement on his companion. "How did she get here?"

"Down the trail. It was quite easy," Blanche answered. "I brought them before dark."

"Before dark! Good Lord—six hours ago!" He was horrified. "You shouldn't have left her here like that! Six hours! Suppose something had happened!"

"What could? She is covered, and there are no animals around that would attack a horse."

"I say you had no business to do it. It's risky, and we don't need them."

"But we do!"

His anger grew faint in astonishment. "Then why couldn't we have gone some other way?"

"We couldn't."

He stared. She, sensitive to the lightest disapproving word, was undisturbed by his heat, imperturbable, smiling. There was no being angry with this girl, whose bright enigmatic glance promised enchantment, if only he would risk a horse, and a wild way, and follow her. Many horses might be ridden to death for her, and more dangerous ways than this followed with her. His anger had sprung from the fixed passions of his life, the distinctive predilection that was part of his character, but there

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was the other passion working in him to-night, the older more universal feeling which he shared in common with the trees and the moon. And this was the middle of the night, the hour she had called her own. They stood on the edge of it. Memories and half memories whispered in his mind—Blanche in the ancient shade of cedars speaking to him of the odd hours, moonrise at sunset, and yellow of dawn. He lifted her bodily into saddle and stood holding her with both hands.

She leaned down, resting hers on his shoulders. "What time is it?" she whispered.

The white silly little face of the timekeeper with busy hands measuring moments was to be their last glimpse of the common world that night. They had left the common world behind on the other side of the forest, and were riding out through the raveling fringe of trees into a naked and radiant plain. A ripple of light was beginning to flow among the pines. The moon, that had been so slow in revealing herself, was growing golden and bold above the heads of the "Sugar Loafs," until, as the riders left the last of the trees, she released her hold of the mountain tops and dared to float out into heaven. She stood high, and poured her radiance down straight. Far on the left it showed him a freckled rolling country, a cliff looking the height of a child's

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leap, and at its foot a streak no wider than a black ribbon. On the right the hills were near and sharp like an embattlement. Between these higher lands the level lay, filled with the moon. Moving in the thick atmosphere of light Carron felt it like a delicious element more volatile than water, more palpable than air, traveling in gradual ways that floated toward him. It was the floodtide of night, of which she had spoken, when the sky and earth have exchanged hues, the bright for the dark, and both are at the full pulse of life. Within Carron, too, tide stood at flood, the tide of spirit and blood that sweeps the will, and with it, makes a triple strength. The elation of being abroad at this hour, of seeing the bright edges of the earth on every side, feeling no limits to distance that might be traveled or wonders that might be born of such loveliness, were all an outer circle of emotion moving around the woman.

Close beside him, swaying a little in the saddle, poised on wiry waist, she appeared less like herself than some sketch of her caught by the lightning of a master's hand—all blacks and whites, her eyes two velvet splendors, her body outlined with a silver rim. Her lips were a little open as if to taste the sweetness of the wind, and she leaned into it away from him, giving herself to the bodiless caress. Her

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glance turned now upon the hills, now upward at the net of stars, as if she found these things as real as himself, as near to her and as awake to delight.

When she looked again at Carron it was with the expectation that he saw what was around them as she saw it; but the fine senses in her that made her feel kinship to inanimate things was dilated beyond his following. He felt the influence of the moon as a bath, but it seemed to have entered into her veins, making her more than woman. The creature whom he had thought petted and tamed beneath his hand, had sprung away from him. Her eyes, which had seen farther than his, reflected more, showed living thoughts undiscovered of him, alluring in their half concealment, seeming to peer at him from just beneath the surface. He wanted to conquer this untamed alien and make it his own. No thought prompted that this is a thing no one makes his own; since, conquered, it dies or changes into something else. But of change who would think, with the moon and the woman in his eyes? He was losing his exact sense of direction. He was unaware of how far the objects in the landscape had retreated from his conscious vision, until her hand upon his arm startled him. The fingers of fate could not have fallen more prompt and soft nor

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with more exigent pressure, telling him, "Wait; here's the time and the place."

He had halted before he looked. They had come up almost to the foot of the wall of hills. They must have approached it over the level in a gradually slanted course, for at no time had he seen it in front of him. He had been aware of it all the while upon his right as a darkish background to Blanche's head; but now the horses had stopped just beyond the long slides of scattered stone, and what had appeared as a continuous rampart separated itself into overlapping pyramids and columns; what at a little distance had worn a dark luster now looked lighter than the plain.

Immediately in front of him a great pale mass of rock rose, upcropping from a base of earth. The Sugar Loaf upon its right lapped behind it. The one on the left leaned upon it, overtopping it with tall cliff-like pinnacles, curved at the crest as if the winds of centuries had bent it. Between these two lay a thin edge of shadow, like a black knife. It encroached not at all upon the lighted front. From the stones at its feet to the crown the greater rock was all one high clear tone, higher and clearer than white. The moon above it lit it like a lantern held to a face. Gray, yellow, silver, who could say what color or if there were color at all? It had a luster at

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least, an extraordinary radiance. Just so, though it had no form suggesting human shape, yet it had a presence. A character was in it beyond that of its fellows, and as Carron gazed he became aware gradually of an untraceable expression, which was not the expression of a human face, nor of any human thought, but the ineffable look there is on insensate things, the look perhaps of Eternity.

To this power overshadowing them, which, should it topple, would crush them and be unaware, Blanche raised her eyes with a glance that hailed it. Following her gaze his remained fixed at the point where the crest of the rock jutted on the black sky. It was shaped like a helmet with wing-like pieces on either side. His glance rushed down the front of the thing. Looked at from beneath it was foreshortened, the hollowed neck was hidden and the window which had led him with its eye of distance was lost. The whole form was flung out of proportion by nearness and too great reality. The strange transformation from the imagined to the actual had taken place, and the actual appeared less real than fancy.

It was not in this fashion he had expected to come to the feet of the Sphinx, nor thus he had thought to find her, hiding the loophole by which she had first led him. He began to wonder if the loophole

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had been of his imagining, or was the helmet shape he saw now a piece of his fancy.

Again Blanche's fingers touched his arm. She spoke to him in a low voice. "Keep well out until we are on the left of her. We can ride in there quite close. See that rock on the ground, the large one with the neck? We can tie the horses there."

It was this girl when he had pointed out the Sphinx from afar, who had surveyed it with unrecognized eyes, and turning her back, passed it by like a clandestine friend in a crowd. Now she named it with the sex its aspect claimed, she moved around its feet as if the ground here were familiar to her. She went with the extraordinary rapidity he had noticed in her when she had an object in her mind, as if the quickest time was too long for getting at what she wanted. Before his astonishment could shape itself on his lips she was out of saddle and running across the interval of space, her shadow flying small beneath her feet. Her feet were climbing in the slide of stones before he had done fastening the horses.

Was she trying to get away from him? he wondered. The questions that had been on his tongue were forgotten. He needed his breath, all of it, if he meant to get abreast of her; and even with lungs like bellows and the feet of Mercury, reaching her

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seemed a forlorn hope. For, lighter than he, and possessed of some devil of agility, she made better headway. She had some yards start of him. Avalanches of soil slid from her nimble heels upon him, and avalanches sliding beneath his own feet carried him back a part of every advance he made, trying to catch at rooted substance to stop himself, but there was nothing rooted. Everything was swept back together. Whither, in such a fury of haste? The pyramid of earth, slippery though it was, was child's play. But at the top of it was planted the mountain of stone, a solid breadth without discernable place where foot could find passage. Yet she was approaching it without hesitation, as though she expected, when she reached it, a door in the blank front would open at a touch. He was scarcely half-way up the ascent when he saw her reach and catch the first firm outcropping. Edging cautiously up over treacherous-looking terraces, of mixed shale and earth, she rested her knee and both hands on a little projecting edge; with a spring, drew herself up; so paused, kneeling; and, being human, looked dark upon the breast of the Sphinx.

For a moment she remained balanced perilously against what appeared the sheer face of the rock. Her glance rose like a bird to the forehead of stone, than darted to the left past it. She made a motion.

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He could not tell whether she had slipped or purposely flung herself forward on hands and knees. In another moment she had vanished. She seemed to have melted into the face of the cliff. He shouted aloud in horror. Immediately her head and shoulders reappeared. She had neither been swallowed by an unexpected chasm nor perversely fled from him. She was waiting for him, peering at him over some invisible edge like a pale brown elf-woman, beckoning to him, as he drew nearer, offering him a helping hand which she could not compel him to take.

He drew himself up beside her, and found her sitting on a broad ledge of rock perhaps five feet deep. There had been no shadow to point it out to him from below, for the moon stood overhead; and no difference of color or perspective to trace it, since the moon, obliterating these, showed nothing but the fine line of the edge which his eye had missed. But now, upon it, he saw it was like a bench or a projecting collar, which seemed to extend all around the greater mass of the stone.

"Why did you do that?" he panted.

"Do what?"

"Rush up here ahead of me, before I could speak to you."

"Because I didn't want you to. You might have

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asked where we were going, and I didn't want to say—not then.”

The words sank into his mind. He received the clear impression that she had some thought beyond the moon and the night; but it did not occur to him as a discovery, nor as being in any way strange, no more than it seemed strange to be poised here on a ledge between heaven and earth. He had come up to these things too gradually. He was, indeed, far off the ordinary tracks men follow, far, far away from the usual happenings of life. Yet once leap up to the high plane of the unusual and all lesser marvels upon it follow as a matter of course.

He had hardly time to get breath before she had risen to her feet. The ledge where they stood stopped on the right, cut off like a shelf. On the left it followed the sweep of the stone above, disappearing into the thin knife of shadow; but it was not in this direction Blanche looked, but up at the rock itself. Too near to take in the aspect of the face, the outline of the Sphinx nevertheless appeared undistorted. The side pieces jutted and overhung the thick column that was the throat; the shoulders swelled from this, a slippery, wicked-looking surface to travel for the bold soul who might aspire to clasp her neck. The overlapping wrinkles of stone had been wrought upon by centuries of

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weather. The forehead was worn by wind, the cheeks by rains, and across the breast a gash, as if the sword of the storm had cleft her. From the ledge on the right it extended upward to the left shoulder, and there disappeared in the shadow. Or was it only shadow? The space between the Sphinx's helmet and shoulder looked profound as the pit. Blanche hesitated, and looked at Carron. "You know there's only a chance we will see anything."

The meaning of the words were accepted in his mind as soon as they were spoken. "Let's go on," he answered. His voice sounded oddly to him. He felt wide-awake, but it was like being wide-awake in a dream. He saw her moving in front of him and had no fear that she might fall. She appeared to him more spirit of the rocks than woman. Some quality in his emotion had changed. Excitement was mounting from his senses into his brain. It seemed to him he had gone very far, farther even in his thoughts than his feet had climbed above solid earth. The sound of pebbles loosened and falling spoke to him of how far that was. He was leaving the thick golden radiance that dwelt in the plain. He felt it slip from his shoulders like water as he ascended into a thinner, keener, more crystal air. The moon was pinned tight in a purple sky. The atmosphere was motionless upon his cheek, until he

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came up over the Sphinx's shoulder. Here a great sigh breathed upon them out of that mouth of darkness. A sudden draft, a sharp drawn line where all that was known ended. They stood on the edge of the window of the Sphinx, and the short locks on his forehead were stirred by a wind from nowhere.

The rock closed in on three sides of them. It was strange to be thus pressed upon by walls after miles of a wide open, but it was not grim as he had anticipated. It was like dipping into black velvet. The footing was firm and only a little slanted. He went forward easily, keeping one hand on the solid rock. The wind blew steadily in his face, and it was no caverned air, but dry, chilly and smelling of forests. At first he could see nothing. Blanche was present only as an echo and the flutter of a skirt; but presently he began to distinguish the outline of her body, moving on in front of him, against a faintly bright distance; suddenly above his right shoulder shone a star. He felt a thrill at his heart. His eyes were ready for the long-fancied unimaginable sight. To peer at the edge of the unknown, the high sensation of the expectant soul! He felt a lightening of the air above him. His companion stopped. She was no longer in front of him, but beside him. In front of him was a sheet of deep blue hazed with white.

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He saw neither what was above his head nor beneath his feet, but only what was in front of him, too far to reach yet not too far to be real, not painted with the colors of distance but still overhung by the glamour of it—the poetic and terrific spectacle of the great brood of mountains.

Their multiplying summits were all in piercing silver light. It ran in outline down their shoulders. On their ledges and divides shadows like wings were folded. The cañon's depth was one black shadow from side to side, the trees like black waves driving up the ravines. The arch of the sky above him was immense, the cañon was the converse hollow. The woven lines of summits binding the two stood stark in the radiance, frozen with silence. The trees, the cold white fire of the moon, the night-hawk, that divided the air with his wings shooting downward like a plummet, were all a part of one thing, one strength, one awful unconsciousness of strength. In the face of it the man's strength was faint. The sense of being human, of being vulnerable and mortal came over him. He stretched out his hand, unaware that he did so, and clasped the woman's. It responded with a tremulous pressure. But he scarcely felt it. He drew her toward him, yet hardly knew that she was there. The awe of what was around them had entered his blood. The beauty

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of it filled his eyes. The pagan in him trembled and worshiped.

At the first his ears had taken in only silence. But that dwelt high among peaks where his eyes had been fixed. Now he became aware of a sound rising from beneath so hoarse and faint that it made a greater loneliness. He looked down, and realized he was standing, not only the height of the Sphinx, but of the whole rolling plateau behind him. He had not realized how far above the other land this lay; but now he could look down upon the running backs of lesser hills, each outline painted by the moon. Over these he had looked into the great cañon, among these the river wandered and complained; and into these the Sphinx's pedestal descended. Carron could see the slide of the earth and the scattering trees beneath him. To a bird the distance had been no great matter, but for a man still in love with life there must be some other way than the smooth thirty feet of stone. No ledges here, once they were over the ledge of the shoulder; but this itself was broad and stretched out to the left where the Sphinx's neighbor crowded upon her. At a point here the two seemed knitted into one, and from the precipitous back of the one to the easy swell of the other's side was a step. The extraordinary path he was following, with splendors for the

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eye and terrors for the imagination was at every turn possible and easy for the feet.

They went down over long shallow terraces, for the spread of this eminence was slow as it neared the depth. The moon had sunk away until it stood above the Sphinx's head. The great cañon sank behind the company of hills. In their black hollow a bright spot rippled like prismsed glass. That would be the river the moon had caught leaping a rapid. Elsewhere it flowed unseen, and was heard as a monotone unvarying and incessant. It was strange to come down upon soft ground again, to feel it yield beneath his feet and see leaves above his head. He was traveling again on broad earth down an abrupt slope, his companion soft footing a pace in advance and threading rapidly among the trees. The sound of pouring water was still like a sound of the distance. He had no forewarning of the broken white which glimmered suddenly beyond the trunks of the pines. It was a line of boulders tossed up in a low irregular wall. This might be a branch from the bed of the greater stream that had been sucked dry by months of sun. Blanche pressed between the rocks or over them warily, looking back to point him a secure foothold evidently known to her, tried, and to be depended on. A creature in flight for her life could have made better use of the minutes. Coming

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over upon the other side above the channel he saw below him the thing he had not expected, the smooth dark surface of water gliding without a whisper, deep shrunken in its bed. At least a foot of the perpendicular wall made glassy smooth by the undercurrent was bare. Higher the rock projected, was irregular and hollowed into shallow caves. Above these the crevices of the boulders were swept full of dry twigs, leaves and grass, powdery and gray, and full of silt. Edging along cautiously, moving her feet carefully as a cat, she stopped and stooped, and gathering her skirts, crept into an opening in the rock.

It was one of those wave-worn caves sometimes to be found in the walls of mountain rivers, in spring covered by the water which now ran some four feet below. As he followed her into the black hole, sliding feet first, he could feel its sides rough and clean as coral; but earth had been loosely sprinkled over its surface, and dry moss, pulled up by the roots, was drawn about the entrance, and once they were both in she pulled it up in a heap, hiding half the opening, leaving room enough for their eyes to look out. The floor of the cave was almost level, so that as they lay stretched upon it, they could look out to the opposite bank, or down into the river. It ran languidly in long ripples. Where they lifted

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the moon caught just the edge; but a little way up stream, still in plain sight, the surface ruffled in silver over gravel, for here the boulders stopped for an interval, and a narrow spit of land pointed out into the stream. This went back to an open space a glistening white patch in front of the forest. One dead pine stood up out of it and made a point of shadow on the bright ground.

The smell of water and wet rock rose to his nostrils. A sharp air hovered above the stream.

"Are you cold?" Blanche murmured. Her lips were at his ear so that the words were not audible.

He shook his head.

"You are trembling."

Carron was not conscious of this, and did not believe it. His blood was aflame from heroic exercise. The air was scarcely cold enough for his hot face. His heart played like a drum on his ribs, the pulses in his wrists hammered, he felt the quick throb in his temples. His breath came short. He tried to fill his lungs. He stretched his feet to get a less cramped position, and a stone slipped in the bottom of the cave. He held his breath, fearful lest it go reverberating in the depths, frightening silence. Blanche laid her hand warningly on his arm. Silence, that large, sensitive, brittle depth inclosing them, they were both of a mind to keep absolute. It

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was so hollow it seemed that a stir would set it sounding to the far mountain tops; but everything that was abroad in it seemed to conspire to keep it whole. Not a twig cracked under any stealthy tread. All creatures that were abroad must be the cushion-footed—themselves respecters of noiselessness. Even the eye could discover no motion. The river might have been a snake stretched out asleep, the trees printed on the sky. The only thing that moved was the shadow of the dead pine, and that was like the hand of a clock too slow to be perceived in motion. He listened with distended senses. It seemed to him he could hear the movement of thoughts in his own brain, the flowing of the blood in his fingertips; but outside of himself not a sound. The air, sick for vibrations, was vibrating by its own emptiness. Like a gong, it assailed the senses in waves, at first beating in upon them from without. Then, as he stretched his ears to hear above it, the gong seemed to be within his head struck upon by his furious pulses, sending out a prolonged shrill ringing, so loud it seemed this sound in the ear of imagination would have drowned a thunderclap.

Not thunder, but a light faint noise at some distance made all the vibration cease. On the instant silence was as still as crystal to the real sound. It rang first as a single dull blow struck like a challenge

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among the mountains. Now it multiplied. It came intermittently, a rapid beating of the same hard muffled substance on the harder rock; now quiet, now repeated; faint at first, growing louder. Dead branches cracked, trampled over. Spaces of earth sounded like a drum beneath the tread. Again, among stones, the ringing was clear and sharp. To those proud feet silence was a thing to strike echoes from. The sound of the approach set the listeners' heart to its measure—rhythmic, wild, irregular, a roulade of liberty beaten out upon the earth. Carron was shaking like a man with a chill. His hands were cold. His throat, dry and stiff, seemed closing against breath. He had to clench his teeth to keep them from chattering; but the girl lay as still as moonlight, though she looked as pale, and her eyes were large with expectation of delight, as if she expected a rose to blossom under her sight, or a bird to fly to her out of heaven.

A rapid trot sounded just within the last fringe of pines, and a shadow ran out from the trees and rested, quivering, on the bright ground. There was a rustle among the pine branches, and the moon shone on a black forelock and pricked ears. The branches waved softly to and fro as the horse came pushing through. He paused at the upper edge of the clearing and lifted his head high. He looked

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large, and doubly large being alone. The state by which kings add to their stature increased his. He gave a slow trepid glance around the clearing, while his wide nostrils drank the wind. Over water and through moss and earth it came purely. There was no scent to startle delicate stretched nerves. He began to advance down the rocky floor at a gait a little faster than a walk. An undulating motion went through the whole body as if the hoofs trod air. The mane waved with it, the tail drifted like a plume. Carron could see the quick ripple of muscles under the satin skin. That was the back that had never felt weight, the neck like a bow that had never bent except at its own will. The white left foot which Carron had seen speeding in terror trod delicately as a girl's on the rocky slope. A star on the breast that had shone at the head of herds now shone solitary. The eyes that had been scarlet with fury were dark and bright and bent on the silver ripple of water as toward the face of a friend. He seemed to condescend to earth with those haughty graces with his own shadow, twisting his head sideways, trifling with its liberty. Miles around him nothing moved that would not run from him, nothing but eagles, and these floated free, and kept an equal state.

At the lip of the water he paused once more, one

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more haughty earnest stare now up, now down the stream and his nostrils fluttered like black butterflies. Then, as meekly as if all the world were his friend, he stooped his head, stretched out his neck, shining while the mane blew in a veil against it, put muzzle in the current and drank.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAN IN SADDLE

COLOR of night was draining out of the sky when the riders took horses again at the foot of the Sphinx. Black and white were rolled in gray, shadows were melting thin, the moon had drifted far down the west, constellations were sinking. All the luster, all the full pulse of midnight were flowing out; and the pulses of the man too were at ebb. His blood ran thin. The sky stood dim and luminous at the hour of neither moon nor sun; and his mind stood between thought and action, dim, dreamy with amazement beyond piercing. If conscious thought had turned upon itself it would not have known what forms were taking shape in the unconscious depth. Memories shone upon the surface, disappeared and appeared again—Son of the Wind as he had advanced down the slope toward the water, sides of silk for knees that dared to press them, head bent waywardly sidewise, at play with its own liberty, and the slow undulation of the mane.

Where had the creature hidden himself between

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the fading hours? Carron could not remember how he had looked at his departing. But who remembers the retreat of a king? It was the advance, and again the advance, that returned to him—the rousade of hoofs afar off in the forest, the sharp music on the rocky slope, the body breaking through the trees. Yet, he did not see it quite as it had come in fact; for to the imagination, the back, that shining hollow that had shivered at a white moth's weight, was not empty. It was bestrode. Once the eye had seen, the brain seized its object. The man was in saddle; and though fancy pictured Son of the Wind in the citadel of the cañon, or speeding among mountains beyond possible human ways, the persistent phantom would not be unseated. Where is the use of sides of silk without heel to guide, or of feet that can chant the song of swiftness if no purpose profit by their speed?

Across the cañon, where night was complete, and upward, under branches, into the high open ascents, mysterious, peaceful, colorless in the beginnings of dawn, he came, his mind filled with images of contentions and conquests. Near the horizon Venus burned white, but the star above his head was Sirius, red and troubled. The woman beside him made a faint rustling as she moved through the leaves. She, who had been quick, filled with double energy,

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of life, now trailed. Her face was a ghost's, her eyes dull gray as the sky, and whenever he looked at her they were fixed upon him, expectant, waiting a word. He held her, led her, but his desires were not toward her. They rushed forward like fire. Visions of beauty swept through his mind, but it was not her beauty. There was no room there for anything but one thought. No room for wonder at the curious path he had followed, nor at the thought of a man and a woman abroad at such an hour; no fear lest the clearing before the house, or the house itself that received them, should be aware of their coming. They went in by the outside stair. In his room objects were beginning to show themselves, the bed broad and pale, the walls gray. Last night they had worn brocade of white and black. Looking at them he had thought of Blanche. Now he looked at her, and thought of something else. He took her wrists and laid her hands against his shoulders. She leaned upon him exhausted, looking up with confident eyes.

"How did you find it?" he said.

"I didn't. It was a chance. I know the place. I've always known it. We camped there one summer when I was a child, and then I found the cave and always wanted to go back to it. It was too far and too hard to get there from here. Up the cañon

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takes eight hours. I had to find a shorter way, and one day I tried the Sphinx's window."

"One day?"

"Well, yes—and afterward one night."

"You told me you never had been out so far in the middle of the night."

She smiled faintly. "I didn't say quite that; and if I did give you that impression it was just as well. I didn't know you then. It wouldn't have been good to tell you my ways. This country is my garden. Sometimes, at full moon when I can't sleep, I am all about it. One of those times I went farther than I ever had before and saw what I showed you to-night."

"Have you never shown it to any one else?" he asked.

Her eyelids fluttered. "No—never. I didn't mean to show it to you; but you are just myself. I had to show you my possession."

"Your possession?" The way she used that word was strange.

"Yes, he is mine. He's mine the way my thoughts are. He is the only thing I have ever known that couldn't be tied and held by the common things in the world. When he moves he doesn't seem to touch earth."

Carron looked at her dully.

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"There will not be another like him," she said. "These wonderful things don't happen twice."

"No," he answered. This was something he could understand. It seemed to him an oracle had spoken. He took her to the door of her room, kissed her on the forehead and left her. The touch of her stirred him with tenderness, but when he turned his back it was forgotten. He was not thinking of her.

The sun came like an enemy and surprised him sitting on the edge of his bed, his head sunk in his hands. He heard the barking of a dog, the flight of birds in the trees, the sound of footsteps, the opening of doors. The flare of yellow had wakened the world into action. His vision of last night with its incredibility and tremendous reality, its silver and black, was melting, and with it all the footless hopes and fancies that had followed him home through the gray air. The power for vision of future or past was gone, and he found himself staring with concentration at a round floating spot of light upon the wall, while his brain repeated over and over: "Why need she know of it? Why need she know? Why need she know?"

He stared at the significance of this, too surprised to reflect whence those words had sprung, born in his own mind or planted there by some other's thought. They were words any man might speak of

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any woman in any affair. The idea was fundamental. It streamed upon his mind like the day into his room. He was confounded by the clarity, the brilliance, the wonderful way it banished cruelty and made everything right. All he had to do was to surround himself with silence. He had no doubt of his motive. The thing sprang bold before him, something he believed in and had many times put to proof, the natural hardy motive of his life. To break, to tame, to change the compound of fury and timidity into the docile and controlled, useful to the controller, sent out among civilized things.

But Carron did not follow his creations thither. He belonged neither among wild nor tame. He stood at the point of transition, where the herds of the primitive passed through his hands into civilization. He stood between the two, to break, always to break. That was his affair in the world. But this instance was raised above his common experience of the world, his work still—but it transcended itself, as the horse his eyes were fixed upon now transcended his kind. For the creature was so far above his fellows; as Blanche had said, he seemed to travel upon wings, a little above the earth. So Carron's hopes. They were proud. He would have published them with trumpets had it not been for the one curious reason. That made the silence. It was not on his

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account, but on hers. It was on her account, because of that strange idea she had, that woman idea, which has nothing to do with the activities of men, that must be set aside very carefully so as not to be hurt, and not to interfere. Therefore silence, absolute, impenetrable! No action, no word, no glance to give any hint to her of what was going forward.

And, since no hint to her on his life, no hint to any other! That would be treachery. But with silence treachery vanished. Silence is darkness. To the eye that sees no color there is none; and to the mind that does not know of an action, that action does not exist. And the action itself would rob her of nothing. For what was it Rader had said? The horse was only an idea to her. She would not lay fingers on the actual creature. She must know that some day she would cease to find it, and be left with her idea and her dream.

What a fool he was sitting here in the sodden garments of yesterday while the hours of to-day ran past him. High impossibilities lay between him and his object, but nothing looked too high for him now. Only a mountain to overleap, and then to mount the back of the wind. Reason might cry, "No man has ever ridden the wind," but a man's will would answer, "Time then for some one to be about it." He was ready to begin, even though he could not see an

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inch of his way before him. Yet, as soon as he looked in the prosaic morning light he saw the first step to take.

He rose and searched among his clothes that were flung pell-mell in the valise, and brought out the message he had written to Esmeralda Charley a day or two before. He looked back at that point in past time as though over a distance of years. What had he meant with such words? An age of passions and events had rolled over him since. He put a match to the paper and threw it in the grate; then made haste to write out another message very plainly.

Unwashed, unshaven, with last night's dust and clay still upon him, he came out of the house into the cool, yellow light. The dawn looked fresh, undisturbed by the overcrowded events that were threatening the day. He made the descent of the hill at a good pace, and hailed the stage, as, plunging on its springs, sending up dust above the tree-tops, it came up from the dip of the creek bed. He mounted nimbly on the wheel, and inquired whether the driver would have time at the end of his journey to do a kindness for a stranger.

The autocrat on the high seat, looking the young man over, inquired what it might be.

It appeared to be this: to take a message to a half-breed, by name Esmeralda Charley. This Indian

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had orders to meet every stage that came in, and he obeyed orders. But the fellow couldn't read; and if the driver would be so good as not only to deliver the paper, but to read it to the man, Carron would remain his debtor for life.

The driver, opening the paper then and there, read the message aloud to the tree-tops.

"Take the stuff out of storage, and bring it with the horses over the watershed, past the first fork of the road, and through the gap into the next cañon. I will be waiting on the road. Be there by eleven.

"CARRON."

The driver cocked his eye at the name. "F. A. Carron? Rancho Caballo?"

Carron admitted it.

The man extended his hand. "Put it there." When the ceremony was over—"See that off leader?" he inquired. "Best horse I ever had. Mouth ain't spoiled nor his temper. Busted on the Rancho Caballo."

Carron expressed himself as gratified, and was in fact. Cigars passed into the driver's hand. The horse-breaker dropped from the wheel, confident of his message being safely taken. What he touched was shaped to his way. He was no poet to imagine fate in this. He saw that it came from his own

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power. But with this business despatched, and the next problem rising to the front of his mind, he felt a chill upon the warmth of his satisfaction.

He had not foreseen the moves in his game. This one sprang upon him as the other receded. He stared at it, incredulous to find anything so at odds with all his determinations, yet so immovably insisting on being a part of his scheme. There was no going forward without it. It was necessary, if he were to get the thing he wanted; but what was to become of his perfect and justifying theory of silence? It would not be destroyed. It would be workable still, and safe enough no doubt, but it would become a makeshift thing—to be passed over hastily, and not too closely scrutinized.

He tossed the question in his mind as he hurried up the road where the dust the wheels of the stage had stirred hovered in a thin fog. Time and necessity were at his heels; he realized he was going to accept the exigencies of his position—but he cursed fate, that put such ugly deviations upon the path of clear enterprise; he cursed Ferrier for being such as he was, and for the first time in his life, for the instant, had an ugly glimpse of himself. Reluctantly he turned down the steep and weedy way that led to the clearing, and knocked at Ferrier's door. He

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waited, and in the pause had a memory of how last night Blanche had told him Ferrier was not there. Suppose he had not returned yet. It was still so early in the morning. Suppose he did not return all day—how was a man to find him—and where? Reluctance vanished. Ferrier became the person in all the world Carron most desired to see. He knocked again, loud and imperative. A voice within the house called aloud. The sound was formless, but he thought it was a summons.

He entered on a long darkish room, disorderly and as cluttered with incongruous stuff as Ferrier's mind. Clothes were strewn on the floor; old saddles rested on chairs; crockery, cartridges and food on the table, dogs lying under it; no windows open, a stale air in the place. Close under a window on a bench, the boy George had a gun and a greased rag in his hand. His shoulders were gathered into such a lump that he looked deformed. He had stopped his work of polishing and sat looking at the intruder with pale eyes, the lids of which were fixed.

"Where is your brother?" Carron asked.

Without seeming to hear what had been said, without moving, the boy opened his mouth and emitted the sound that Carron had mistaken for a summons to himself. Evidently it had been meant to

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call another person, for now an inner door opened quickly and a man half dressed appeared at the aperture.

Seeing Carron his face flushed. "Just a minute," he muttered, backing quickly from the door, and would have had it shut but Carron's foot was already in the opening.

"Just a minute," he said, unconsciously repeating Ferrier's words, though with quite another meaning. Booted and belted, he felt his advantage, moral and imaginative, over this fellow who was scantily clad and had bare feet. It would be good not to give him time to clothe himself or arm his mind. Carron pressed through into the room beyond as Ferrier retreated, pitifully embarrassed, and by his glances behind him and around him a little apprehensive.

"Sorry to be so hasty, but I can't wait," the horse-breaker said. "I had to see you immediately. I am going up into the mountains to-day and I shall need your help. Get ready to meet me in a couple of hours."

Ferrier gulped. "I don't think—" he began.

"I've got the grub," Carron went on, as though he had not heard the protestation. "You won't need anything but a blanket and a sweater. Take ammunition if you want it—you won't need it, though. I'll only want you for a couple of days."

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"But I'm not going, I tell you!" Ferrier burst out as if the idea that he was not, made him furious.

"What do you mean?" Carron demanded. "I'm only accepting a proposition you made yourself yesterday! Have you forgotten it?"

"No," Ferrier said doggedly. He stooped so that his face was hidden, and began to fumble nervously for his shoes. "But I can't do it."

"Why?"

"I'm afraid."

"Of what?"

Ferrier gave him a darting upward glance.

"Of what?" Carron insisted. "You weren't afraid of anything yesterday. Has there been any change in the situation since?"

"No—no, no!" Ferrier cried vehemently. He looked frightened.

"Well, I didn't suppose there had been," Carron said coolly, "and in that case you're going to stick to your bargain. Come," he added more kindly, as Ferrier continued to fix him with his panicky eyes, "I'm not asking much of you, only that you show me the trail, and perhaps a few hours' work when we get to the end of it. You needn't see the game we're after." He paused, and considered his hesitating opponent. "And there's one part of your bargain we are not going to stick to. We are going to revert

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to mine. I mean that one hundred dollars I promised you if you would take me to the place. You will get that, of course."

Ferrier, kneeling, holding one boot, stared before him and breathed hard through open lips. It was strange to see him there, struggling to face the idea of possible consequences, calculating value, weighing the chance of what he might lose against what he might gain, when, as the horse-breaker knew shrewdly enough, as far as this man was concerned there were no chances left. What Ferrier was afraid to lose he had already lost, days ago, when for twenty dollars he had told Carron the way to Raders'. Yet he was too stupid to realize the truth. He was wavering as if he still held fate in his own hands.

"If they should find out I went—" Ferrier began at last.

"How could they?"

"By going out there."

"They won't." He stuck religiously to that indefinite plural—as though it could deceive either of them.

"But if they should hear?"

Carron aimed each word slowly and distinctly at the miserable man in front of him. "How are they going to hear if I don't tell them?"

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Ferrier's face grew perceptibly paler. His mouth opened a little into a round shape, remained speechless as if the words it was formed for had been blown away.

"And I am not going to tell them," the horse-breaker concluded emphatically. There was a ring of magnanimity in these words that he did not quite like; it sounded as if only Ferrier was to benefit by this silence. Yet after all wasn't that the best thing for the fellow to think? Let him think what he would. He was not to be explained to in this matter any more than he was to be lied to. He was to be commanded. He looked now scarcely so much reassured by Carron's words as carried off his feet by a stronger will.

He moistened his lips. "And afterward you will go?"

"Yes."

"Right afterward?"

"Yes," Carron repeated impatiently, and with the repetition hated himself more for stooping to deceive such a poor creature. It was no lie in the letter, and was the worse for that; for the meaning the promise had, in fact, was very different from the meaning it had for Ferrier. A look of relief spread over his face.

"All right," he said. "I'll be there."

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"If you're not—" Carron stood a moment and looked the poor soul through. "He's more afraid of me than he is of himself," he thought. "Very good," he said aloud, and turned about. "And where is this place that I am to find you?"

Ferrier pulled on his other boot and got upon his feet. "I can show you from the other room," he said, and led the way.

In his excitement he seemed to be oblivious of the squalid surroundings he had blushed for, his own half-clad condition, and even the presence of the boy George. He walked to the window and shoved him aside as if he had been inanimate stuff to make room for Carron. The horse-breaker touched his companion's arm. "You had better send him out, hadn't you?"

Ferrier threw a hasty glance at the child who sat, as he had been pushed, a little farther along on the bench. "Lord, no! he never understands anything, we might talk all day. Look down there," he broke off, pointing through the dirty glass, "down there by the edge of the pines where you see that one that is taller than the others. That is the place where the trail begins. That's where I'll be."

"But," Carron began quickly, astonished, and forgetting everything but astonishment, "on that trail you can't get a horse through."

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"Thought you didn't know about it," Ferrier said, turning.

Without a quiver Carron caught up his mistake and made capital of it. "I know what I see from here," he said coldly, "and it looks to me very much as if your trail ran into those hills. It does, doesn't it, eh?" He pointed. "Over there?"

Ferrier corrected, "No, over there." With outstretched arm he indicated the place farther along, just out of their sight, where the Sphinx stood.

"Here or there," the horse-breaker insisted, "I've seen something of such hills and I'll be willing to bet we can't get horses through."

Ferrier looked sullen. "I'd forgotten you had to have them. I suppose, then, we'll have to go the long way."

Carron was relieved. He hadn't been certain Ferrier knew the long way. Blanche had mentioned it so casually. She had not said that he knew. Carron had only inferred and snatched at the inference. Now he was at the end of his doubts. He made short work of the tale. He had it all in a few moments, the place where they were to meet and the hour. He reckoned that, allowing time for packing the canvas, the half-breed would get in with the led horses in three hours. That would make their meeting at eleven, say. It was now past eight o'clock.

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He left the house, and plunged into fresh air as into a bath. The excursion he had had to make from his high resolves of silence was over. It had been more unpleasant than he had expected. And at the end, in spite of his care, he had not quite succeeded in keeping Ferrier under heel. The man had made conditions with him. But now at last the unfortunate incident was behind him. The lie straight out to the Raders would not be hard. It was a part of his robust scheme. It was in the cause of silence—that good and decent cause—that he intended to speak, giving the women sound invented reasons for not coming back to-night, or even the next night, as a man must sometimes give to his own people. Certainly that was what these people were to him; and with them also he wanted to square certain other matters, to have them out as clear as he kept the other dark, before he went.

Had Mrs. Rader wanted to abet his project she could not have done better for him than give him the room with the outside stair. On this occasion it enabled him to enter the Raders' unseen, bathe, change, and appear down-stairs looking as debonair as if he had passed the night in dreams. After a little searching he found Blanche with her father in the study. Rader, his long chin in his hand, scarcely looked at him. Carron thought that, since their talk

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of the night before, perhaps the scholar had given him up, a hopeless case; or it might be only that he was surrounded as he was usually in the morning, with his habitual mist of thoughts. But Blanche raised great, prompt eyes from her business of copying, and gave him a look difficult to interpret—love, envy of his gay morning looks, and the intent, insinuating gaze of one who would recall to another a secret, remind him of some wonderful thing both knew, and no one else in the world. How at that look, last night's adventure returned to him like a ghost rising in broad daylight—the race with the moon, the ascent of the Sphinx. Footsteps on the edge of death! He was appalled at the risks he had let her take. He must have been insane last night! And when she was alone, think of it! It was good all this was to end.

Sitting on the table, between father and daughter, Carron explained himself. He was off, he said, for his last two days of hunting. He expected to be back day after to-morrow night. He wondered if the scholar would suspect anything from this—but Rader's eyes which seemed fixed upon him were probably fixed on some theory a hundred miles beyond him.

He wondered if Blanche would think his departure strange, coming so quickly on the heels of

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last night's revelation. He wondered if she would expect him to stay, to talk over with her what had happened, to hear more from her about it. This he did not want, even if the time had been his. He gave her a glance as he got off the table, but her answering look said, "I didn't need that. I'm coming anyway."

She followed him out into the hall. No sooner was the door shut upon them than she clasped him around the neck. "Don't go, don't go! I am so afraid something dreadful will happen to you."

This gave him an unpleasant start. What was she talking about, he wondered.

"Last time you came back with your head hurt," she said in a trembling voice. "I'm so afraid."

He laughed, relieved. "Not a bit of danger. That was sheer clumsiness." Yet somehow her caresses, and her fears for him did not flatter him. He felt uneasy in their enfolding. He had not called her out here for any lovers' scene. He had a desire to keep to business. "I'm only going to get a peace offering of venison, for your mother," he said. "Tell me, what did she say when you told her about us, eh?"

Blanche leaned coaxingly toward him, tilting her head sidewise until the brown crown of it came caressingly against his ear. It was a way she had of luring him out of seriousness, and beguiling him, but in this case it didn't do.

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He took her by the shoulders and held her off from him. "Didn't you tell her?"

She drooped guiltily. "Don't be angry. I was going to, but then I thought about last night—of showing you what I did, and I couldn't seem to think about anything else. I thought I would tell her to-day instead."

He found himself a little jerked back in the ease of his arrangements. He had expected to find this matter settled. "Then go and tell her on the spot, and ask if I may see her before I go. Never mind if you don't feel like it," he added, as the girl hesitated. "We ought to get this thing straightened out."

"It isn't that," Blanche explained, "but I am afraid I can't, not now. She isn't up, you see, at least she isn't out of her room. She has a bad headache."

"Can't you speak to her just the same?"

"I'm afraid I can't. Her door is locked, and she says she mustn't be disturbed. I knocked a little while ago, but she doesn't answer. I think she is asleep."

Carron bit his lip. He was afraid to press the point too hard lest the girl suspect something in the wind; and yet to have to leave everything in this doubtful mess! He had meant to have his relation to Blanche well understood before he went. That

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was in case Ferrier should see fit to talk while he was away. And then suppose anything should happen to himself. He knew of course nothing ever did, but a man had to consider it.

"What is the matter? Is something wrong?" Blanche's voice was anxious. Evidently she was unsuspicious of anything threatening her mother's peace of mind, and it was as well that she should be. It would be better to keep her quiet, yes, as quiet as possible, where Ferrier was concerned.

"Nothing is wrong, but suppose your mother had heard of this from some one before she heard it from you. It would have hurt her." He was righteous and austere, and Blanche was impressed. "As soon as you can, tell her about it," he said. He understood from her humility that this time she would, without any doubt. He was beginning to get control of the situation, to gather it together under him, tightening all the reins in his hands. "And there is something else I want you to promise me. You won't like it, but I want you to do it."

They had come to the end of the passage to the little hall of many doors and the single stair.

"Yes?" she stood looking up at him questioningly, languidly. Blue shadows were beneath her eyes. The cheek below the temple looked hollow. Poor child! It showed him eloquently how right he was.

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This business of a Son of the Wind was no business for a woman. She ought never to have been in it, or known anything about it. What he was about to do appeared magnanimous to him.

"About what we saw last night," he said; "don't go any more."

She fixed him with such forlorn and dreary amazement that he forgot his scrupulous feeling for not touching her, and took her face between his hands. "It was beautiful, but it is too much for you, it is too far away. You are worn out. You look like a ghost."

"But I am always like this afterward."

"So much the worse! Besides, the journey is too dangerous. It is awful for you, and awful to think of you alone in the middle of the night!"

"But I have always—"

"Promise me!"

"Then I shall never see him again!" She stood, an intense and tragic little figure. The spectacle of her suffering made him ache, but the feeling in it he knew was absurd.

"Remember," he prompted, "you are certain to lose him soon. With the first rains he will be gone." He bent her head back until it rested upon his shoulder and he looked directly down upon her sullen lids. "Why not have the night we saw him together the

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last night?" With his instinct for managing unreasonable creatures he had hit upon the right argument. He could see it working upon her. Then he added the last touch. "And next week you will be gone."

That brought up her eyes as if they saw the future in one wide flash, an unknown landscape stretched out before her and beneath her, into which she must descend, through which she must travel. She shivered. He felt her relax. Her weight rested upon him. The color between her lashes was wet blue, and reflected him—a little purer in line, and finer than he was in fact, still himself. Her promise was not made in words, but he understood her well enough not to exact that. It was a curious thing, beautiful and rather awesome, to have a creature whose unspoken thought was a sworn oath. It was more than most men could circle with two arms. He thought this as he held her.

She raised her hands, resting them on his shoulders, and smiled at him. "I'm glad we did see him together, though. Remember the white moth—how he hated it, even that weight?"

Carron did not know why such a simple sentence should make him uncomfortable. He took her hands from his shoulders. "My dear," he said, "you are far too good!"

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She looked as indignant as if he had accused her of a sin. "I'm not!" she said vehemently.

"I mean to me," he explained, amused in spite of himself. "It's your one amiable weakness, and it's made me late. I've got to hurry."

Something he had said seemed to have embarrassed her. She was a study of indecision; looked down, looked sidelong, opened her lips to speak, swallowed her breath.

"I will see you in three days," he said. "Back Thursday morning." He had taken the first steps of the stair, when she called his name.

The sharp and quavering sound made him turn quickly. She ran to the foot of the stair as if she was afraid he might dash away from her.

"There is something I must tell you," she began hastily. "Last night I said something that was not true. I didn't mean to—I didn't think! I thought afterward! I told you that no one but you had seen the horse, but Bert Ferrier has seen it."

This was scarcely news to Carron. He had heard this fact so long ago that he had come to take it for granted, but she was tremulous with compunction. Conscience sat in her eyes. She took hold of him as if she was afraid he might break away from her in rage. "I couldn't help it," she protested. "The trail, you see, goes past his house. I was very care-

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ful, but one night he saw me. I didn't know it. He followed me."

"Yes, yes, yes," Carron said hastily. His attention was all awake. "And now something has happened that makes it necessary for you to tell me?"

She nodded. "Yes. When you were talking about my not telling mother, that I shouldn't have put it off, and all that, it came to me that I was putting off telling you this in the same way; and then, when you said I was too good, I couldn't bear it! But you went away so fast!" She panted. "So I ran after you."

Carron felt mystified. "Well, what is it?"

She looked puzzled. "Why, that is it."

He laughed. "My dear child, what difference does it make so long as it doesn't affect our—" he had almost said "my"—"affairs?"

"Oh, but," she opened large eyes at him, "you must know everything about me. You ought, because we are so close, you see. Everything should be said between us."

"For fear sometime I might hear, and be angry, eh?"

"No. Even if you never should, even though I knew you never could! All the more because of that. It would be dreadful for me to keep things from you because I knew you would never find out."

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He pushed a distressed hand across his forehead. "Yes, yes, I see!" but he didn't in the least. He only felt as if a weight were upon him, that could not detain him from going in the direction he wanted, but could make the going hard work. What a heavy necklace a woman could be when a man was straining after something else!

"And there is another thing," she continued, "that may really make a difference in our affairs. I don't know what you will think about it, but you see when he followed me—"

She had come to a full stop, and again fear rose in him. "Well, when he followed you?"

"I didn't see him until we were on the other side of the Sphinx, almost at the cave; and I couldn't make him go back. I didn't dare spend time to try even, for fear *it* might come and be frightened away for ever. So he came into the cave. And afterward he wouldn't promise not to tell. It wasn't that he wanted the horse," she continued hurriedly, "but because he wanted—" again she stopped, beginning afresh. "I was so excited and so afraid I told him if he would hold his tongue I would do anything that he wanted. That was what he wanted, you see. He asked me to marry him then."

Carron's eyebrows rose, his lips fell a little apart. This was an unexpected joker in the pack. He didn't

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know what it meant. She stood there, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands in front of her. "Did you say you would?" His voice sounded with such a short note that she looked frightened.

"No—I didn't; but I couldn't say I would not, either, you see. I didn't know what to do. It wasn't fair! He knew I didn't mean I would do such a thing as that. But he believes I will now, after what I promised. He believes he can make me." She held her hands locked, and looked at him beseechingly. "I don't think he can hold me to it—do you?"

Carron began to shake with laughter. "No, my dear—never! You can be sure he won't even try." He seized her, and, in an access of wild spirits, whirled her. "Don't be troubled by that for a moment. I'll look after him!" The sight of her perplexed face struggling with a smile, because she saw, since he laughed, something must be amusing, sent him off again. He would have liked to wring the wretched Ferrier's neck, but the thing was infernally funny. Blanche, confessing the awful wrong she had done him; with her naïve compunctions for keeping her word to that little black hound, who had so secretly, shamefully broken his to her! She had never been so dear nor so funny to Carron as now, her hands lost in his, her cheeks like satin—exquisite surfaces to touch—and all surrounded by that

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curious limit, the ideal; looking at him through the clear element of innocence, taking his word for everything, as if it had been the fall of fate. Leaving her he looked back at her, down at her, standing between the dark walls of the stair. Strange, inexplicable being! What trifles looked large to her, what gauzy ideas seemed real, what nonsense she talked, that was the very devil to get out of his ears. If only she had retained that one little elision of truth between them, kept on her side one piece of double dealing, it wouldn't have made his business quite so hard!

Hard? He wondered what he meant by that word. The scheme wasn't hard, it was easy; and what she had told him made it easier. It made one more security for Ferrier's silence. He looked around the room where every morning her hands had made disorder smooth, and was aware of a vague irritation beneath the surface of his spirits. He laid hold of materials as if they had been his enemies. His guns were folly—play acting! but he had to take them. Everything else could be inclosed in the roll of blankets and that was light. He worked feverishly, knowing himself late, a thing he hated. He had meant to be at the place of meeting before the men. Waiting had a bad effect on a courage like Ferrier's. As well expect a rabbit to wait! He

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hoped Blanche would not appear again to say good-by.

Going out into the hall he thought he heard a stir in Mrs. Rader's room. He stopped. Perhaps she was coming out to speak with him. He would not mind having a word with her before he went. He listened. Presently the noise came again, and this time he recognized it. It was not any one moving. That sharp sound, so quick to transfix a man, held him motionless, and staring at the door. He had not thought of Mrs. Rader as a woman who cried. Still, women with headaches— But was it thus women with headaches cried, as though the whole of unhappiness had been made audible in a single sound?

There was something unusual here. An unusual impulse sprang in him to meet it. He advanced toward the door with the courage to knock, but, confronted by the blank wood that covered silence, his fingers grew limp. Suppose she were only in pain, and wanted to be let alone, what a fool he would be blundering in there! And even suppose Ferrier had kept his promise of yesterday? How much time would he spend in reassuring her when Blanche could reassure her just as well—better! He hung on his heel, hesitating. Riding as hard as he could he would scarcely make his appointment. He slung his roll on his shoulder and went briskly down the hall.

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He did not fail to make his steps audible, thinking if Mrs. Rader had anything to say to him she yet might open her door. But there were no more figures to start up at him and stop him, it seemed, and no more voices to call him back. At last, he was away!

A wind was blowing down through the pines, making the branches creak. At midday the air was keen. Thin white clouds were streaming and perpetually shifting in the sky. Only at the zenith remained a piece of clear blue. He looked up at it and smiled. The thought of Blanche returned to him, not this time as a being made of scruples, but as a pleasure, arms at the end of a journey, a living color fixed for him, for ever in the gray changeable face of life. Now for the sharp adventure!

The chestnut felt the mood of her rider, shivered and danced with sympathetic spirits. "Ah, my pretty girl," Carron murmured caressingly, "if you knew where you were taking me you wouldn't be in such a hurry to get there." His eye was critical upon her. His pet, the pick of herds, aping the thoroughbred, now appeared to him over-narrow in the chest, too hollow in the back, weak in the withers. "Your rival, my dear," he cruelly assured her, "and a lot more than your rival besides!"

This was what he had come for, and what he expected of himself, and it was thus he recognized

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himself, moving under open skies with men, no matter whom, as long as they obeyed him, at any hour of the day or night, it didn't matter which. But in this case, to the familiar conditions there was added an unfamiliar surrounding. There were mountains where he was accustomed to see plains. He had a few scant days where he was accustomed to use as many weeks, and he saw ahead of him all the difficulties, unexperienced and uncalculated, arising from new conditions. The very trail was unknown to him. Every step he took forward was strange. No time now to look back. His only retrospection was when he reached the place of meeting, and saw the half-breed waiting there—and Ferrier. At the first glimpse, "You little hound!" he thought. He shook inwardly with amusement. Everything the fellow did was ugly, yet somehow it looked trivial. Carron would have liked to pick him up by the collar and pitch him aside, anywhere, down the cañon for instance, but unfortunately it was necessary to have him, a guide and a leader for horses.

Their point of departure from the road was at the very place from which, more than two weeks ago, he had looked longingly up the "Highway of the Gods," felt he was turning aside from the right way, yet thought that way impassable. Had he stepped just off the road and, stooping a little, looked down

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toward the right, he would have seen the trail, very faint, discernable only to the mountaineer's eye, gliding past, protected on either hand by rock and timber. Had he done this he might then and there have followed it, found alone the dark hills and the river, seen, alone, what he had been led to last night. So chance might have befriended him. Just as well, she might have led him astray. He had spent some strange days on a side track, but it had led him back again in one of those circuitous, long routes compounded of character and circumstance which men call fate, to this place where he had fixed his fancy first, with the gates growing nearer in front of him, and the blue garden of mountains beyond.

It was not an easy trail, and getting away on a trail into the mountains is much like getting away from the coast to sea. There was hard choppy going, tacking and changing before they began to get the hang of it, get into the swing of their pace, see the tops of eminences all around them like tops of breakers, lose sight of the road and all thought of roads, and rejoice to find themselves voyaging in the welter of heights. Carron's activities had begun, and plunging into them, he stripped himself of the vanities and comforts of life as a runner throws aside garments. Necessities appeared luxuries, and as the impetus gathered headway the necessity for

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motion left other necessities behind. Food was the first, for he had started at daybreak with most casual foraging. He had forgotten there could be such a thing as set hours when people gathered at table. Eating had become an act that gave a man energy for greater acts. It was something to be snatched at a moment by the way. As for sleeping, the owls had more anticipation of it than he when night brought the sky black above them, and the moon like an apple of silver. He, who had tossed on a bed and thought of a woman, now felt the rocking saddle under him, heard the river, heard the wind in his ears, saw the rising stars.

Men and horses, they slipped in among the black hills at eight in the evening, too late for work or for anything but turning in. Men and horses camped some half mile below the ford, Carron himself lying close in the cave. He had expected nothing for that night, yet when nothing came, no sound challenging silence, no shadow on the broad moonlighted open, he experienced a sense of defeat. His heart was a house of doubts. Reason asserted that it could not be every night the creature came to drink. He might watch out two nights, three perhaps, before the moment came. The fear remained in his mind that before it came again he might watch for ever.

He contested this idea, refused to believe it, reck-

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oned the past, and perceived that because he had refused to fail he had never done so. Then certainly this was to be a success. Problems that rose upon him for the next day restored his courage. They were difficult. They required the whole of his brain in coöperation with imagination—the imagination of the mathematician calculating toward an unknown quantity, making the brain servant to the inspiration. In a few years he had worked out his problem, perfecting it, a method of capture all his own. Now in a few hours he had to readapt the formula of the plains to the mountains, to reckon what must be added, what could be left out. It must be a triumph of omissions, both because time was to be husbanded and because of the difficulty of work in the forest without leaving the signs of work. On the plains the trails of men are more easily erased. The footsteps are covered with dust carried by the wind, and the same wind in the wide open carries away the human scent; but here with forest on every side, the spongy soil underfoot, and an air shut in among heights, there were delicate surfaces on every side to take the print of the human, and report his elicited presence to delicate, superhuman senses.

The men moved as guardedly as thieves in a house. A broken branch would have been a warning to

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the wary master of the solitude, a wisp of smoke an alarm. Therefore no camp-fires were kindled—not even a pipe lighted. Therefore no timber was hewn. Carron used the strength of the forest, making the posts of his barrier growing trees. These were thick on three sides. On the fourth where the river ran they used the poles, sinking them in the sand of the ford, and where that failed, and the water flowed away into rock, the canvas was stretched as tight as three men could draw it along the high bank until the forest could give it support again. It was finished by noon of the second day. All that was left was the harder task of waiting.

That night black clouds rose with the moon, and unheated, uncomfited, they shivered and endured. Carron was so far advanced into the intense strain of the approaching crisis that he believed himself calm. He believed it did not matter whether anything came or failed to come. Let come what would, nothing could move him again. At one o'clock or a little later, the false calm went into a thousand pieces. With the first sounds in the distance his nerves began to cry out. Uncertainty plucked apart resolution. Will the creature detect the change? the barrier hidden, the runway in the forest? No—still coming, drawing nearer. Now, he is stopping! He has scented it. He must already have entered

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it. Surely that edged instinct that has never been surrounded will feel the unseen barrier creeping upon him, drawing in from each side! The shadows of the pines on the moonlighted space were an embroidery of gray that moved before Carron's disordered sight, the moon was like a white flower in the clouds, a vague blossom of light, when the thing happened.

The sound of a ridden horse crashing in the forest came behind the rhythmic approaching trot, and instantly a double rushing of hoofs. Hark! which way is the driven one running? Is he coming, or has he turned to charge his pursuer? The man's excited ears, sounding with their own pulses, could not distinguish. He heard the night broken by alarms and echoes. He scrambled from his hiding, and remained half fallen upon the rocks, gaping like a terrified boy seeing a visible thunderbolt. It seemed to be going clean over the barrier over the stream. Then the recoil too quick for the eye, the turn. The moonlighted space was empty; but there was a sound of a passing like a storm among the trees. Away for ever—away to the other side of the world—away from the man who thought to corral the wind. Hola! There it came again, the swing about. What had happened? Carron's bewildered senses recognized the flight of terror. Now

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he heard it on the right, now on the left among the trees; and at intervals his eyes saw a black, gleaming body shooting like an apparition across the open space. It disappeared and turned on itself, and appeared again! The water was churned white in the ford.

That was a fine charge of fate, a brave challenge of the inevitable—but not over it! The hoofs that could dash out a man's brains scattered pebbles. Swiftmess that had covered long distances straight now ran in a circle like insanity. Birth of the winds, skimmer over the world, by all miracles he was real! He was caught between walls of earthly stuff; and a little drunken human being, drunk with his moment of power, danced among the boulders, threw up his hat idiotically toward the moon, and raised his voice in a quavering cheer.

CHAPTER XV

THE SUPERB MOMENT

FOR a time which he had no way of measuring he knew he was beside himself. He was Carron, perhaps, but he was Carron translated, caught up in the flesh into paradise. Voices from the earth were shouting anxiously, "Look out, look out, he'll get away! That stuff will never stand it!" He laughed at them. It was only canvas—but hadn't Carron set it up there? That was reason enough for its never coming down. He published himself the conqueror of the unconquerable, and, staggering with success, he still remembered to order some of those vague people around him to make sure the gate closing the corral was fast. He had a coil of rope in his hand, ready with the lasso lest there be any danger of escape. Himself with the others made sure of the barrier by light of lanterns and the clouded moon. His heart was going a hundred to the minute, but his watch measured off the minutes as it had measured them two weeks ago, or an hour ago. The caps of the mountains stood steady, extraordinarily insensible against the sky.

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Amazing how still everything was! He heard only the chuckle of the water, the brittle crash of men's footsteps in the brush, and the pacing of the thing inside. That moved as if it never would be still again. Sometimes he saw it, a black bulk among the trees, then black and silver swinging through the moonlight space, to be swallowed again in trees. It was like a disappearing appearing form in a dream. It looked so improbable to him he half expected it must melt before his eyes, and change into something else. Then the moon set, and he no longer saw, only heard. Reality retreated further from him, and at rare intervals when the sound of the hoofs stopped, it seemed as though the horse must have vanished. At last the flood of night and magic ran out and left him with his captive, visible, real and still in his hands.

In his hands, not figuratively only, but in fact. Carron remembered for a long time the moment when he first touched the body which had appeared to him like a vision. It lost nothing in value, though he had proved it to be flesh, though he fastened it with ropes. Rather the value increased to him. For now he could see every detail of beauty and found them perfect—perfect proportion, form without a blemish, youth in the teeth, and lineage in the fierce, full eye. The inheritance from remote, illustrious

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sires spoke there, and in the small head, and fine thin mane. But there was another inheritance in the creature that manifested itself strangely. Bound, held immovable, strained into humiliating contortions, there was still a look of aloofness in him.

While the ropes cut into his flesh, they had to believe they handled him; but once the ropes were off all sense of controlling him or ever having controlled him, was gone. With his foreleg doubled back and fastened sharply up beneath his belly, lunging at every step, the illusion of liberty still hung about him. Something that was big in his narrow brain, something that did not understand what bondage was, seemed even in the narrow inclosure to take him away from them. It seemed almost as if the famous heritage the Indians claimed for him was truth. Carron, with a hot heart of triumph, with cool, calculating eyes, surveyed the creature, and decided that he would take a deal of letting alone. Let him alone for the first twelve hours; let him get used to himself in his new conditions. To-morrow they could put the halter on him, and perhaps be able, the next day, to lead him out. Meanwhile the horse-breaker made tentative experiments in driving him, and had plentiful examples of how obstinate, fierce and quick an animal with only three legs to use might be.

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They had hobbled Son of the Wind while morning was yet small and golden on the tops of the hills. Afternoon, rushing upon them, found their camp established. No need to cover trail now. The place in the wilderness was like a box broken open, the treasure of its inviolability gone. Trails were trampled, horses picketed. There was the reek of tobacco, the smoke of fires; and the odor of cooking was blown to noble, unhuman, indignant nostrils. Even on the other side of the Sphinx, ready for the man who wanted to make the shorter journey, a pony browsed among blowing fodder that had been strewn for him there. All was filled with the clutter of human expedients—beautiful if a man looks to the expedient—and Carron did. Some uneasy change in the atmosphere, sharpening odors of dead leaves, deepening of distance colors, intensifying of cold, warned him that time for what he wanted was growing short. How short he could not tell. Dawn of the next day showed him. The cold rose in the east lighted an ominous prospect. The sky, which yesterday had been violet, was blue like a sword; there was an edge in the air that went to the bone. A cloud stretched in a pathway from the east to the zenith, and its edges of opaque gray continually spread toward the north and south. Nature measures her seasons with no thought of giving a background

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for the prodigious performances of men. Oftener their plans are dashed to pieces against her immovable system. So Carron thought, staring up at the cloud. By that he had two days. He calculated hours and events.

The first, most important, was a thing quite outside the business in hand, but it was a precaution, and necessary. He felt a vague distaste for what he was about to do, without knowing why. His momentous affair took all his mind. Every person and thing about him was absorbed into that interest. Ferrier no longer existed to him as an individual. Ferrier was simply the factotum of the camp, and had no connection in Carron's thoughts with any other place or moment. He explained to Ferrier what was expected of him: to take the pony waiting at the foot of the Sphinx, get in to Beckwith as fast as possible, meet the vaquero coming up on the morning train, bring him to the place where the trail passed Ferrier's house, and direct him along the way. "That will be all I want of you," he concluded; "we will be on the lookout for him on the other side. You need not come back." He added that Ferrier would better stop in at the Raders' and tell them that Carron would not return to-night as he had expected, but probably the day after to-morrow. He ended with a feeling of triumph that at last

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he had done with this unpleasant assistance, and might kick it behind him, and forget that he had had it. Ferrier stood planted in the middle of the trail where Carron had stopped him, looking at the horse-breaker with an astonished air. "Why do you want to send a message to the Raders if you aren't going back there again?" he demanded. "You've got the horse, haven't you? Then why don't you get out as quietly and as fast as you can?"

Was there no leaving this fellow behind? Was he always to be with a man; more than with him—ahead of him; starting up in front of him with some devilish pertinence of the past?

Carron replied evasively with what was a part of the truth, that if no message was sent the Raders might become anxious and despatch some one in search of him, and people coming upon him here in his present situation was certainly the last thing he wanted. It was not probable, but in this case he preferred to be on the safe side. If Ferrier was afraid of questions he could carry a written message, and he could tell Mrs. Rader that a half-breed had brought it to him at his house.

This reassurance did not seem at all to touch the point of the man's fear. He would not, could not, dared not face the Raders! He was afraid to go back. He was afraid to go home. He was afraid,

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it appeared, of everything outside of Carron's shadow. He clung to that as if the horse-breaker were his one protector and friend.

"But you will have to go back some time!" Carron insisted. "You will have to go back day after to-morrow when I am gone. Why not now? What's the difference?" He was exasperated, but he couldn't help smiling. Ferrier was a figure to make Melpomene smile. He was laden with impedimenta from the first camp down the river, blankets on his back, camp kettles on one arm, rifle under the other—a tragic stubbornness in his face. "There is a difference," he said. He glanced at Carron, then at the trees, at the steep ascent of the Sphinx in front of him. He seemed to be a man with more than one dread. "When you are gone, you're gone," he began rapidly, "and the horse, too, and then I'll be certain they'll never find out. But while I know you are here, if I should see them, and anything should be said, I'd get rattled; I know I would! I'd give it away! They'd get it out of me."

"Come! That's no reason at all—a girl's reason!" Son of the Wind had renewed his plungings. The hollow stream bed multiplied echoes. Carron looked past Ferrier to the opening in the trees, which gave a glimpse of the ford at a little distance. He had been at broad grin, and the expression continued to

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draw his lips, but in his mind he ceased to be amused. His forehead wrinkled in anxiety to make out what sort of thing he was seeing.

Ferrier swung around on his heel. "Oh Lord!" he said.

The apparition was no dreadful one. It was planted leg-deep in the middle of the stream, the body a little crouched together, the head held low on a stretched neck, elbows bent, hands carried forward—no, those must be paws. It was an animal that had scented, just risen to its hind legs for observation. Carron watched to see it drop back on all fours, and experienced a vague, uneasy astonishment when it began to move forward still upright on two feet, wading through the ford. With each step forward the animal aspect melted; by the time it had climbed the bank and emerged upon the level the illusion was gone; yet, what remained, or rather what had evolved itself, though it was not beast, certainly was scarcely human. It was in fact that being which Ferrier had never called his brother, and which as it approached, appeared to have no relation to the man on the road, or indeed to any man. A shaggy deity of the forest might have stared with such foreign, incommunicable eyes, not cruel, not crafty, not even vacant, but containing nothing human intelligence understands. Behind him the

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sound of horses' feet was audible, tramping, continuously circling, now on the rock, now in the water.

"How did he get out here?" Carron said, turning upon his companion.

"I don't know! How should I know? He goes all over the country. He's everywhere. What difference does it make how he got here?" Ferrier retorted breathlessly. "He *is* here. Don't you see? He's been over there—he's seen *it*! He's seen me! I'm afraid—" He shrank into Carron's shadow. "Don't let him get by! Don't let him go!" he whispered.

"Why not? He doesn't understand anything?"

"Not what he hears—but when he sees a thing; and he saw me!"

"And he sees me. Steady," Carron murmured. "He isn't trying to pass us. He's coming toward us."

The boy had diverged a little from the path, and was advancing toward them through the trees with great deliberation. His movements were smooth—no pause, no quickening; slow, yet apparently without reluctance. His gaze was on Carron's face. What did he want? Was he bringing a message? He had not the aspect of a messenger whose purpose would be haste, and here there seemed to be a purpose in slowness. It chained the attention. Was

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this insanity? Had the simpleton gone mad? It was the natural explanation; yet, the creature had never looked less mad than he did at this moment. There was something beneath the surface light of the eye—something discriminating and personal that does not belong to insanity. Drawing closer it appeared as though, centered deep in each pupil, there was a live, concentrated spark. It shone dimly, as if from behind a veil. He was in front of Carron when the veil seemed to lift, and the meaning blazed. Hate, the high human prerogative, for a moment, transformed the nameless little being into a man.

A wave went through Carron's blood, hotter than dislike or disgust. The senses acknowledged an equal, were ready for an opponent before the mind could think. George Ferrier was furtively advancing his foot, and very slowly extending his hand. The horse-breaker watched it, feeling himself attacked, not knowing in what manner to guard. He reckoned how hard he could strike to stun without killing. The tips of the fingers had almost touched him when the boy leaped, not forward upon his adversary, nor backward from him, but sidewise, like a cat.

Carron clutched at him, grasped air, and stumbled forward on hands and knees. He heard something dash past him up the slope, the ringing of iron on the ground. He got to his feet in time to see the boy

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dive into the underbrush like a fox. Bert Ferrier, like a hound off the scent, ran back and forth whimpering, "Stop him, stop him!"

Shouting to Ferrier, to Esmeralda Charley to beat up through the bush, Carron ran up the trail. It swung far to the right, then as far to the left, and the first sharp turn commanded the underwood to the river. From here he overlooked the sea of dull green, saw the half-breed floundering in the bristling stuff, saw Ferrier running along the edge of it, his rifle still in his hand. He was frantically waving the other arm, and seemed in terror, a divided terror, lest their prey escape, and lest it spring unexpectedly upon him out of the scrub. But out of it came only a few birds, rising on wings to their air trails. Carron's glance ranged to the left. The fugitive might have edged away in that direction. Nothing stirred.

Ferrier, abandoning even the appearance of helping the Indian, came pounding up the trail to where the horse-breaker stood. "It's no use! You'll never find him!" he panted.

His face was red, and his voice piped through his laboring breath. He looked furiously at Carron. "Why didn't you hold on to him? Why in hell did you let him get by you?"

"How in hell was I to know he was going by?"

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He was coming toward us, as if he wanted something."

The elder Ferrier snarled with disdain. "Of course! That's what he meant you to think! That's what he was aiming for from the start—that's how he fooled you." He triumphed in Carron's discomfiture; was proud for once of his brother's attainment. "Oh, he fooled you fast enough! He's smart enough sometimes! Look, look!" His voice, breaking off its scorn, quavered. Both men stared aloft. Higher than the place where they stood, higher than the trees, a ripple ran like a snake on the tops of the bushes. A light crashing was audible as though some animal was traveling swiftly, invisibly.

"That's not he!" Carron shouted it in his amazement. "He couldn't get above me!"

"Oh, you think no one can get above you! I tell you *he* is!"

"I tell you there hasn't been time!"

"He runs like a coyote."

"A man can't run in brush."

"*He* can!"

The ripple had reached the end of the underwoods. There it transformed itself into a bending and rending of twigs, then into a dark human form, which emerged upon the naked breast of the Sphinx.

"A-a-ahh!" Ferrier said. The sound came from

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the throat, an animal's voice. He threw his gun up to his shoulder. Carron was quick enough. He knocked the muzzle up, and the bullet sang into the sky. The figure on the rock flung up long arms above his head and brandished them. Whether the contortions were delight or derision it was impossible to know—but certainly they were not fear.

"I won't kill him!" Ferrier said. "I only want to get him in the arm or leg; I want to stop him! He'll get away!"

"Drop it, or you'll get a slug in your own body!" the horse-breaker said sternly. He took the gun, threw off the cock, and looked again up at the Sphinx. The boy had disappeared.

Ferrier sat down and howled. Carron felt like laughing. Now that the bewilderment of the unexpected was past, the appearance of George Ferrier ceased to be alarming. It appeared to Carron one of those accidents, dramatic and arresting in aspect, which are no more portentous in fact than a dream. It had gone like a dream. All that remained to him was irritation at being outwitted, and a shiver of the flesh. But this poor fool on the ground—what ailed him, smitten as if by the appearance of his fate? What could the boy report but that he had seen a horse in a corral? How could he report at all? With what gesture, what intelligible sound? One

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thing that was to the point, was clear. Ferrier's performance had been shocking, but it was only evidence of abject nerves. He would never do for a messenger. He would blurt out the secret to the first face. Carron touched him compassionately. "You're used up," he said. "You'd better get some sleep."

He made ready himself, giving the half-breed final instructions: to drive the stallion into the open part of the corral—Ferrier could help him with that—and put up the second wall of canvas at the edge of the trees; to leave the mares in the corral, and, at intervals to try whether the stallion would drive with them; to see that Ferrier didn't get at any whisky.

The brown, little man listened attentively, and offered no comment. He was the sort to have—a fellow with a dog's faith, and no ideas in his head but the ones the horse-breaker had put into it. A pity he had to be left alone with the full weight of responsibility, Carron thought, and said so. "What if any part of the corral should be ineffective? The half-breed contemptuously smiled. Fifty horses like this one, he represented, couldn't get out of it.

"There aren't fifty like this horse, Charley," Carron said, "there isn't one." His quirt was in his hand; his sweater pulled to his ears, his cap to his eyes. Whistling he climbed the terraces of stone,

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and passing through the window of the Sphinx, descending, took horse on the other side. The first, maddest elation had subsided. He had come down from the skies, but he was still Carron seated on top of the world. He ached with the prolonged tension of the last three nights. He had wrenched his shoulder in spoiling Ferrier's aim, and an old rheumatic pain stabbed him with intermittent fury; yet he had never been so happy in his life.

The sweet consciousness of achievement coursed through brain to finger-tips — not the dubious achievement of the mind, not the quality of facts, but the fact itself, the incontrovertible success of the hands. He had succeeded before. As far as he could remember he had always succeeded; but it had been with lesser things; and then to get one thing he had invariably had to give up another. He had put that down as a rule of life, had never expected anything better; but now he had, at once, the two things of all the world he most wanted. He had only to keep them apart very quietly that the one should not know of the other. It was a dizzying discovery. Never, since he had been a boy, had life seemed so filled to the brim with everything for him, so limitless in possibilities. Nothing would ever say no to him again. He breathed deep, drawing the future toward him.

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If he had done as he pleased he would have returned with his man from Beckwith straight to the camp in the shadow of the Sphinx. But there was no avoiding the stop at Raders'. Since he had told them he would be back that night it would be safe to put in an appearance and let them know that everything was all right, especially since that appearance of George Ferrier. It was midday when he left his vaquero to wait for him at the foot of Rader's Hill and ascended the road between the bending trees. All this country, which for long had lain asleep in the sun, was beginning to stir uneasily in the shadow of the cloud. A shiver, rather than a wind, was in the wood. The road was without its diamonds of light; the clearing before the house without its noon circle of sun. The house itself looked as small to him and as frail as a paper box. He felt that he could kick it over. There was a continuous, dry rustling of dead stuff. The rushing of the pines sounded like surf. Glorious weather! He jumped out of saddle and ran along the porch. How beautiful to rush in on them and tell them about it. Why, in the name of Heaven, were women such strange sweet fools?

He heard the barking of a dog inside, and opening the door, Beetles met him, hailed him with leaps and crouchings as his deliverer, his master, his adored

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and worshiped god, returned at last; from where, was of no interest to Beetles. Carron caressed him, assured him that he was an excellent little dog, but not at all the person wanted, and went on in search. At this hour the women would probably be in the kitchen together, but the room was empty. A cloth was flung on a chair as it might have fallen from a careless hand. The sink was full of tins. "They will be back in a moment," Carron thought; but inspection showed the fire in the stove to be nearly out and the water in the pans cold. In the dining-room dishes stood on the table as they had been left from breakfast, the shades were drawn high, a cold light filled the place, and flies sang in the panes. Impatient at not finding people where he expected them when he wanted them, he ran up-stairs. No answers to his knocks. Down-stairs again, and an inspiration seized him. It was possible that they were employed in some way about the greater house. He opened the door which led from the little hall into the large dining-room. Here he experienced the curious sensation of one who enters a room in which he has been on one occasion, with which he has but one association. Carron had not been here since his first morning in the house, when Blanche had led him through, and now the odor of the place, dry and enclosed, revived the past moment. He had a flying

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recollection of how she had looked to him, that clear first impression of personality, just how she had walked across the floor between the tables and the army of chairs. It seemed almost she must be crossing it now, one foot advanced with the temptation to slide, glancing at him with serious, sidelong turn of her head.

No one was crossing it. The tables had been pushed back against the wall. A glassy surface stretched uninterrupted, reflecting like a pool of water, but at the other side of it, the sole figure in the expanse, the scholar was standing. He was fronting Carron, but did not appear to see him or hear him. He had the look of being adrift in the large place, stranded by the table, clinging there, a limp body without volition. His gaze was fixed upon a white sugar-bowl as though it contained the secret of the universe. Carron looked at him affectionately. This was his fellow conspirator who was responsible for to-day's triumph. He was more glad to see the scholar at this moment than any other person in the house. He wanted to shout out the good news from where he stood, to wring his hand with congratulations. "Hello," he said, "are you getting lost, Mr. Rader?"

The scholar raised his head with a nervous toss, peculiar and characteristic, and stood at gaze. Thus,

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surprised and blank, he might have regarded the appearance of a stranger.

Carron made a run and a slide across the shining floor. "Didn't you expect me?" he asked.

Rader had backed a little as if this onslaught had nearly put him to flight, and now, confronted immediately by the man and the question, "No," he said, and looked down. "I've dashed in on him too suddenly and scared him out of his thoughts," Carron reflected.

"I told you I would be back to-night," he said.

"Yes, but—" Rader's air was embarrassed and shy. He seemed unable to get any further.

Carron smiled encouragingly at him. "I have had good luck," he said. He couldn't resist that much, though he knew he was treading dangerous ground.

The scholar raised his large blue eyes and fixed them on the young man. There was a spark in the center of each, the flame of a most acute distress. The signal reached Carron even in the citadel of his success.

"What's happened?" he said. He was dimly concerned that his friend, this good fellow, should be unhappy, suffering. Still he was smiling. Everything that happened, or might still be happening, among the people of this house looked far beneath him and small as the things on earth appear to a

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voyager in a balloon. "Has Mrs. Rader heard yet, I mean the facts about us, eh?"

"Yes," Rader answered, "she—"

The outer door closed and a precipitous step came along the hall.

"Oh Lord!" he said helplessly.

"Brace up," Carron urged. "It's all right. It's only Blanche."

"It's Mrs. Rader," the scholar said. "You—she—"

He had started again to speak of his wife, but if he wanted to give Carron a hint of any sort he was too late with it. The young man would have wagered it was the girl's step he had heard; but the door opened upon the older woman. Her hair was blown, and a shawl was held over her shoulders. He scarcely knew her coming in with this headlong manner. She saw him and stopped. The draft carried to the door behind her with a clap that sounded like a gun of defiance.

Here was no time for smiling, however much a man might feel like it. The woman fates were against him—and he must pull a sober face. He went quickly, propitiatorily forward. "Mr. Rader tells me you know about it."

She did not speak, but holding the shawl around her with nervous fingers, kept looking at him in a

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way that made him uncomfortable. "I am sorry you don't like it," he said.

She turned from him abruptly upon her husband. "Are you a man?" she demanded. "You could stand here and let him come in?"

"How could I help it?" Rader inquired querulously. "He was in here before I knew." He sat down disconsolately in one of the army of chairs.

"You wouldn't have kept him out anyway," she retorted. "You care more about what you want to do than about your own blood."

The subject of this discussion stood hearing it as if he were hearing of some third indefinite person. He felt astonished, and curious to know what that person had done. "Mrs. Rader," he urged, "I know very well that from the first you haven't liked me, but I am not such a bad sort as you think."

The woman's breast heaved as if her narrow frame were too small to contain her emotion.

"You know what Blanche thinks about it, I suppose?" he added.

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"You won't see her!"

"My dear Mrs. Rader," Carron protested, and began to feel irritated, "you have not heard the facts?"

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"I have heard enough."

"For instance?"

"I have heard about the horse."

With the word everything, even Rader's aspect, became serious. "What horse?" he said coldly.

"The wild horse."

He looked at her steadily. He knew that, if his eyes wavered an instant, something in his mind would waver too, and lose grasp of the situation. A dozen thoughts were struggling there for first place. "Did that boy George tell you?"

"It wasn't George. It was Bert."

He shouted at her. "He couldn't!"

"Why? Did you think he was loyal to *you*?"

Carron didn't hear her sarcasm, her triumph; heard nothing but the preposterous fact. He shot a glance into the past and saw the passionate, futile figure of the man on the road. That fellow, immolated in confession, blazing up at the last with courage enough to dash down his own hope with his rival's? Admirable desperation, who could have dreamed he had that much in him! Carron could have sworn he knew his man to the hilt, but he couldn't imagine how Ferrier would look meeting the pinch of the facts. "Exactly what did he tell you?"

Mrs. Rader seemed to find something in his manner she did not understand. "He said he met you

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on the road coming up here, and that you asked him where there was a house that would take you in over night; and he directed you to this one."

Carron's attentive ear marked the omission. "Well—and then?"

"He said that after you had been here a few days you asked him if he knew the whereabouts of this horse, and he told you he had never heard of such a creature. He said, too, that you had tried to find out from Blanche."

"When did he tell you all this?"

"It was three—no, it was four days ago that he told me about the horse; but since you first came he has been saying you were only playing with Blanche."

"I see!" Carron was feeling hot and white. "And did you ask him, by any chance, how I had heard, in the first place, there was such a thing as this horse?"

"Yes, but he said he didn't know. He supposed that some one in the house must have told you."

Carron made a silent commentary on his belief in miracles; a commentary also on his understanding of the science of cowards and of lies. He had been a mere child in Ferrier's hands, superb in his confidence in himself, never reckoning how easy it would be for Ferrier to scamp the story. "Your husband did not tell me," he said, "if that is what Ferrier made

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you think. I knew before I saw Mr. Rader. What I got from him I got out of him without his knowing. I got it out of all of them. I got it out of Blanche in the same way; but I got it out of Ferrier in the first place. He was drunk, and part of that was my responsibility, but he knew what we were about well enough when it came to the bargain. He didn't tell you he was paid for it? Naturally! Loyal to me? He hasn't been loyal to any of us! He—" Carron saw wide pictures of memory—Ferrier bargaining him away from Raders' by promises of the horse; hailed out of his house trembling, reluctant to fulfil his promise—weeping by the trail that he had been seen there—seen! What use of repeating it all. Mrs. Rader was eying him challengingly. "Then you don't deny you came here for the horse?"

"No—it's true enough."

"And now you have him."

"Pardon me, how do you know that?"

She showed a little trepidation, as if she felt herself advancing into deep water. "Because I didn't believe Bert's story. It sounded like a made-up tale. A wild horse running in the mountains, that he knew about, and Blanche, and even Mr. Rader, and that I had never heard of! *He* wouldn't tell me a word! She flashed an unforgiving glance toward where the scholar sat drooping. "But afterward, when I had

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thought it over, how strange it was that you should have come here—a man like you! And then when you went away again, and said you had gone hunting, and stayed so long, I began to be afraid. Then I sent George out.”

He interrupted. “How did you know where to send him?”

“Bert had told me the place. He told me everything he could think of to make me believe him.”

“How could you make George understand?”

“George is strange. Places he seems to remember, and that is a place they all knew when they were children. Besides, are you sure he didn’t see you start in that direction? It seems to me he must have seen something or I couldn’t have made him know what I meant.”

Carron mused, and nodded. “Yes, he may have seen something in the way of direction, I remember now. But how could he make you understand what he had seen?” He looked at her hard. There was something equivocal in her expression.

“I—I don’t know how, exactly, but he did.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter. I *have* got the horse. So that’s understood, isn’t it? All right! Now will you tell me what that has to do with my marrying your daughter?”

“With your marrying?” She seemed confounded

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with that simple fact which had been accepted in his mind so completely that he thought it had been his intention for ever.

"Yes; didn't she tell you?"

"No—yes—at least she did say something, but Bert said you had only let her think it because you wanted—"

"Well, of course! He would like to marry her himself!"

"But you said you wanted—"

"In Heaven's name," he burst out exasperated, "can't a man want *two* things? You seem to think it's impossible I should care about her. I'd like to know why. She's beautiful, isn't she? She's a most extraordinary sort of girl, isn't she?"

He wasn't sure that Mrs. Rader had taken in his revelation of Ferrier's treachery, of his own double dealing. But this fact she heard—heard and seized upon the declaration where her daughter was concerned. That, it seemed, was the test of his character for the mother, the pin upon which all virtues hung. Her face was painful to see, in its struggle to smile, while the accusing look still hovered in eyes and forehead. She twisted her hands nervously one in the other.

"Oh," she said; "why didn't you tell me before?"

"We told you as soon as we knew ourselves what

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we were about!" The exasperated voice of youth spoke from him, angry at age who, with cold blood, sees so clearly. "At least," he added, "she meant to tell you four days ago—the same day I told Mr. Rader."

"Has he known, all this while?" She flashed a glance at that third person, sitting forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his large hands hanging limp from the wrists. It was plain he was unaware of the conflict, the whirlwind of words going on before him. His trouble, which was seated so plainly in his eyes, was fixed upon some circumstance, remote from the present, perhaps not even spoken by these two so bitterly concerned.

"He probably forgot about it," Carron said cheerfully. "There's no harm, but we'll have to see that Ferrier holds his tongue."

She reflected his returning rush of spirits with a wan, anxious smile. They looked at each other like people who feel themselves emerging from a chasm of dangers safe into the air. With an impetuosity that was her daughter's she took him by the sleeve.

"You must tell her what you have told me; make her see it as you have shown me."

He held back. "Tell her what?"

Still anxious, but with a rising confidence, she supported his look. "When George came back he

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didn't come to me—he went to her. I didn't want to tell you at first, but of course she is the only one who can understand him. I thought you understood that she has heard about it.”

Carron's knees felt loosened. A faint cold breath seemed to run through his veins. He was not aware of speaking, or of even wanting to speak, but he heard a voice sounding too high and complaining to be his own, which he knew was moving his own throat.

“Now, in the name of Heaven, what made you meddle in my affairs?”

“It was her affair too! I had to meddle in it! But what difference does it make now?” She looked ready to laugh at him. “You will have to make her believe you love her; and she will believe you.”

“But she knows it now!”

“Ah, no, she doesn't,” Mrs. Rader said significantly.

“What did she say?”

Rader's voice entered the conversation suddenly. “She doesn't speak—she doesn't look at me—she hasn't moved since she came back an hour ago.” From where he sat he could not have overheard them. He must have spoken from the heart of his own thought.

The words produced the impression of a weight

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falling, awakening a silence. "Back from where?" Carron asked. "Where has she been?"

"The place where it is, the cañon, the cave," Mrs. Rader explained. "She wouldn't believe us. She wouldn't even believe George. She went out there herself to see."

To see! He understood what those words meant. All the tongues in the world could not have convinced her; but the sight of the eyes, that power to stir up passions! Here was an end to silence, to dreaming, to everything but facts. It did not appear to Carron then that men had a part in the making of facts. They looked entirely the work of fate. "Where is she?" he asked.

"In the stable. She sits there just as she got off the horse." A slight quiver moved the mother's lips. "I can't make her come away."

She was looking to him to do that apparently, since he had been the doer of everything. But this stupid, timid woman had undone the whole. All his diplomacy in a wreck, all he had hoped to save for Blanche in agonizing nerves and confidence, all precipitated around his ears. "She will have to suffer while I go through with this business," he thought. The confident smile Mrs. Rader wore made him furious. The woman had no idea what she had done. He pulled his sleeve from her grasp and walked

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quickly out of the room. With all his astonishment and rage, he was horribly conscious of the slipping past of the hours. Time, the enemy of triumph, of rapture, of the perfect moment, was streaming past. He began to run.

Past noon, and rain in the cloud! He ought to be climbing the Sphinx, and setting foot in her sacred window. The hard floor changed to strewn pine-needles beneath his feet, and a cold wind blew upon him. This instant he ought to be on the ground with the captive in his hands. He saw his pony tethered a rod off. How easy to catch stirrup and away, to the great affair! It wouldn't do! Flight would be the worst thing at this minute. The thought of Blanche's eyes, meek as they had last looked up at him, those eyes drowned in tears made him shiver. Over-confident, over-sensitive she was. One could fancy the storm of her weeping. And ugh! how it could drench a man's spirits!

He dived into the barn as into a cavern. It was dark, and echoes followed his heels. The door of the smaller stable stood ajar. There was nothing unusual here that he could see, only the odor of harness and fodder, the empty space of floor, and not a sound except that of a horse eating. Looking into the stall he saw the mustang still saddled, with his bridle trailing neglected underfoot. A few steps

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farther, and he perceived a being his senses abhorred—boy, imp, or evil genius—sitting on his heels in the shadow of the wall. His eyes, shining with a dull, diffuse light, were fixed in a certain direction. Carron's look followed.

She was sitting on the lowest stair of the ascent to the loft, and except for her gloves and the whip she held in one hand, she might have merely strolled over from the house and stopped here a moment to dream. Hard to believe that red and white gown looking so woman-like and of the fireside, had fluttered bold in the face of the mountains. The knot of her hair had slipped, and, still twisted with its pins, lay on her neck. A longish lock escaped and hung at her cheek. Her chin rested on her hand. Her eyes were fixed on one certain spot on the floor. Her forehead was smooth. In the dark light her cheek shone like a pearl, and not the trace of a tear. She was prettier than usual; prettier than ever! Had the Raders suffered hallucination? or had he? Everything that had passed in the house appeared a nightmare. He felt a rush of astonishment and delight. "Why, Blanche—my dear girl!"

She did not look up. His impression was she had not heard him. Yet he knew she was awake, her eyes open, their lashes winked. He put his hand over hers. The muscles did not stiffen, nor show

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any consciousness of his touch. She did not move. Her profile had a look of being fixed in an eternal attitude. The boy, crouching in the shadow, seemed fixed in endless contemplation of her, watching like a dog until she should lift her finger; or, if she never lifted it, patiently abiding. Carron hated him. He turned his back on him, sat down, pushing for room on the step, and put his arm around the girl. Her breathing made her insensibleness the more uncanny. "Blanche, what ails you? Speak to me!"

Her lips seemed to have lost the consciousness of everything they were made for, speech or kissing. But when he touched her cheek a shiver passed over her, and, as if she had felt the small wing of an insect, she brushed at him. He turned her face toward him and had the full look of her eyes, wide, dull and gray. He could not tell whether they saw him or not—a strange sensation!

"Blanche!" Mrs. Rader's voice broke sharply upon his ears. She had come through the door, and stood now directly in front of them. The smile that had exasperated him so was gone. She looked frightened. "Why don't you answer? Don't you know it's Mr. Carron?"

"Don't you know me?" Carron repeated.

Blanche moved her head with a jerk, shaking off his hand. The concentrated gaze and the voices

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had reached her, galvanizing her into a consciousness of the world. She got up. The effort of muscles was convulsive, a frozen body reawakening. The motion carried her to the middle of the floor. She looked around her. It was the impulse for flight. Her body was drawn together for the dash. Even now she did not appear to see them, only to feel them as a pressure, closing in upon her. When Carron made a movement forward her hands went to her face, pressing her temples as if there she felt the attack most. "Don't come, don't come," she said. Her voice sounded mechanical and flat.

"But I want to talk to you."

Staring between the narrow pent-house of her fingers, her gaze fixed upon him, intensified with the beginnings of recognition. "Don't speak! I can't bear it!"

"But you must!"

"Oh-h-h!" she moaned, turning her head restlessly from side to side as if to avoid some unendurable vision.

"It is a bad business," Carron said quickly. "But it is not what you were thinking. It doesn't mean that things between us are any different. They're not! I feel about you exactly as I did in the first place."

Her eyes, unassured, were fixed upon him as

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though she wondered what that feeling could have been which he had had in the first place, which he had now.

"I know what they have been telling you," he insisted. "They've been telling you that I have been here only for the sake of getting at the horse. It's utter nonsense! When I came to this place and found you I forgot about the horse. While we were here together I never even thought of it. When I asked you to marry me I didn't care whether I ever heard of him again or not!"

"But then, you took him!"

The cry was there. The prick, the point of all her bewilderment. "Yes, but I *saw* him! It makes a difference. I couldn't help it then. No man could. He's the best thing I have ever seen. Nothing I shall see will even come near him! And I've been after him so long!"

"Why didn't you tell me?" she said.

He was silent. That question seemed to him to answer itself. He heard a stir behind him, and a breath drawn sharply like a sob. He had forgotten the third presence, which all the while had been behind him and silent; but now inarticulately audible, sounded an echo to her daughter's cry—confirmation.

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"If I had wanted something of you," Blanche insisted in her rapid, uneven voice, "I would have gone to you. Why didn't you come to me? Why did you go to them? And they—" She took her head between her hands. "I can't understand it! I was sure of my father. He has been my friend. I told him everything; yet he told you the moment he saw you, everything." She raised her eyes to the little dusty window high up the stable walls as if in that she could see the other not present presence. "I've known him ever since I was a little girl; I trusted him. He said he loved me; but he told you, the moment he saw you, everything. And I am yours, am I?" She turned to Carron. "I thought I was closer to you than to any one in the world. I showed you what I loved because I thought that you, you too—and yet you didn't tell me! He was the one who told me." She pointed at George Ferrier, who sat, like an ape, on his heels, and looked at her out of the dark.

This was more than Carron could endure. He took her head between his hands and turned her face to his own. "Don't look there; look here. I know, I know, Blanche—I've been a brute. I ought to have had it all out square with you, but it's done now—all wrong. You've got to forgive me!"

It was the first time in his life he had ever made

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that statement. He had to drag the words out of his throat. She stood looking imploringly at him as if what he demanded of her was hard for her.

"It wasn't done in cold blood; part was done before I even saw you, and after I saw the horse I give you my word I hardly knew what I was doing! I forgot how you would feel!" He put his arm around her and pulled her toward him. Her body, tense as a bow, strained away from him; but just the grasp of her, having her again tangibly his own, faintly responsive in spite of herself, was comfort enough after the ugly moments of separation. "Come," he entreated, "it's for you to be generous! Be good to me! Forgive!"

She trembled reluctant, but as if the contact was too much for reason she pressed her cheek against his. "I can't bear to have that word spoken between us! I don't want to forgive you. I'd much rather have you forgive me. I want to have you right, always, always, beyond anything I could say!"

The words poured into his ear in a half whisper, her breath sweet and close upon his face, like the touching of lips. He adored the humility, the heavenly abnegation, the forgiving of transgression—the beautiful fit attitude for women. Since his manhood had stiffened in him he had not known tears; but now he felt them forcing up into his eyes. "My

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dear, you'll have to take me as I am, an ordinary fellow."

She sighed, and the sigh seemed to take possession of her whole body, shivering from breast to fingertips. "But, if you had only told me first!"

"Yes, but if I had? You would never have let me come near it!"

"Ah, no! and that would have been so much better! It would have saved us all this suffering. It would have saved him too."

"Yes—but—"

"I know what you are going to say." She leaned her head back to look up earnestly in his face. "But it will not be the same with him again, any more than it will be the same with us. There'll be that difference always with him for being caught once, even if always afterward he is free."

Carron's hold on her relaxed. "You don't expect me to let him go again, do you?"

He could feel her fingers that had grasped his arms with such energy growing limp on his sleeve. Her eyes, growing cold, were fixed on his; all the woman, body and mind, suddenly deprived of motion. "You're not going to keep him," she said, and let the end of the sentence fall as if that fact had been fixed before the world began.

"But I have him!" Carron objected. He was

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astonished that she did not see the argument there, how perfectly achievement gives the right to hold. That had been the fixed sign of his life. He never doubted it. The comprehension of what she expected of him, the full height of it, shot up before him, and he laughed. "Turn him loose again now? That's too much to ask of any man!"

"But you said—" She looked bewildered, a lost traveler, stumbling in a dark continent. "You said it was a bad business. You said it was all wrong—that you hadn't known what you were doing— You asked me to forgive you!"

"Yes, I know," he explained patiently, wondering how she could be so stupid. "But that was for not telling you what I had done, deceiving you, if you like to call it that—not for taking the horse. There's nothing wrong with that."

"There is, there is!" Her voice, without rising, gave a powerful sense of the rising tide of will. A flush covered her face like a cloud, and in the middle of that her eyes looked pale and bright. "He isn't meant to be tame! He must not be! He can't be!"

"Now, my dear girl," he broke in, "we've had all that out before, and it's absurd. I am not going to lose the thing I came here for, and have gone through God knows what to come at, because you have a notion or a dream."

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In the pause he was aware of the close odor of the stable stuffing his nostrils. He heard the mustang eating steadily, and the stumble as the creature caught its foot in the trailing bridle. He heard above his head, somewhere higher up than the roof of the place, a restless rushing like the audible passing of the hours. Beneath his eyes the girl's face appeared a silvery oval, most curiously quiet except that her hand was pressed against her throat, and queer little convulsive movements disturbed her mouth.

"You asked me to be good to you," she said suddenly. "You asked me to be generous; you said you loved me. Be good to me now. Be generous to me! Show me that what you said is true. Even if you can't understand why I want it, just because I want it so much, because it means everything to me, let him go."

"But, there is no reason in it!" he burst out.

"Reason?" she said in a voice that threw reason into the pit.

"Yes, reason. You are talking about something you don't understand. You think this is a brutal business, but it is nothing of the sort. It isn't broncho-busting. It's the best, most humane way ever invented for handling horses. It's my way!" He offered that as the final argument not to be doubted.

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"You saw him at the wrong time. They all look their worst when they are first caught!"

She shivered, and hung back from him, but he held her fast by the arms.

"Wait, wait, give me half a chance. I'll show you how beautiful he'll be when I get through with him."

With a wrench she got herself free. He had held her so fast he didn't know how she had managed, but suddenly there was a fighting creature in his arms; then all that remained of her to touch was a bit of red and white from her sleeve. There she was, standing at a distance from him—distance between them, and she as strange as another world! All his conscious blood was hot with her repulsion of him. She had forgiven him. This brutal dissension of will had sprung upon him unawares, transforming her. "Are you going to let him go?"

The metallic tone calling him up to judgment rasped on his tight nerves. "No!" he almost shouted the word. "I'm going to break him—do you understand?—to break him!"

She closed her fingers on the light whip she still held, as if it were as much as she could do to keep from bringing it down on his head. Her face was bleak. The high bridge of the nose looked higher than usual and sharp. All the pretty mirage of tenderness had melted, all vision of themselves as lovely

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bodies invested with radiant intentions. They looked at each other, and knew each other over again from the beginning, people of jealous conceit, without charity, with passionate wills for their own predilections, born enemies, who had thought themselves lovers. Her lips tightened without a smile, showing a flash of teeth. "You can't!" she said.

The words struck him like a flat palm in the face. "Don't you teach me what I can or can't do," he said hardily. "I know my business, and it isn't a woman's business." He emphasized each word with a nod of his head. "You keep out of it!"

Her eyes opened wide as if to take in to the full the altered condition confronting her. Like a woman confronted by her rival, recognizing a greater power, she felt her own breaking. "Yes, yes, yes!" The words came from her in a wail more of fury than of sorrow. "I'll keep out of it! I will never see that again! I'll not see you again! Never in all my life!" She made a wild gesture of hands, sweeping everything away from her.

"Of course, you'll see me again," he said, indignant, thinking she impugned his honor. "I shall be back to-morrow."

Planted there in front of them she appeared as immovable as marble. With a last passionate outburst all feeling in her seemed to have spent itself. "Once

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you are out of here, don't come back." He looked at her in stupefaction. What she was saying seemed to him ridiculous. "I will never see you again," she said. "I wish you had died before I had seen you, before you had done all this harm."

"Blanche!" Mrs. Rader's voice drove into the conflict. The appearance of her, as if out of nowhere, with her loosened hair, and the drapery of her blown shawl, was like a warning apparition, a figure that had been carried there by the wind.

"You don't know what you are saying!" she cried at her daughter. "What is the horse to you, or fifty like it? What is that to you beside the man you want?"

The girl looked at her. "I don't want him," she said in her monotonous voice. "He's not mine. I don't know him. I have never even heard of him."

"Don't be a fool!" Mrs. Rader said. The words came out with a dry sound, almost with a smile. "You know him as well as any woman can. You think you have been badly used," she went on with increasing bitterness, "you think you're suffering, you think this is the end of everything. It's nothing—it's only the beginning! You'll forgive worse things than this before you're through, and you'll be glad to do it. I tell you a year after you're married the horse will be nothing to you, and every-

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thing you ever thought or wanted when you were a girl will be like a dream. But you'll remember this man all your life, and you'll be sorry all your life if you let him go!"

As well have spoken to the winds, or Son of the Wind himself, leaping against the barrier.

"See what you've done to her!" the woman cried, turning to Carron. "Why weren't you careful? Why didn't you make it easy for her? Now, there'll be no stopping, there'll be no changing her. Speak to her!" she entreated. "Blanche, listen to him!"

The contending voices beating on Carron's ears seemed to be holding him back. He heard words, but did not hear their significance, only felt the force behind them, a tremendous inflated opposition to him. He wanted to lift his arms and dash down the clamor that was heaping up around him. If only they would wait, just wait, with all their demands and questions, which were nothing but words, only words in the air, until the great action was complete. Then there could be time in plenty for talk. He thought he spoke this to them, he thought he said they would have all right to settle their questions in, but for this business of his there was not an hour to waste, not a minute. Yet he was not sure what he had spoken. He did not even remember afterward how he left the women, nor

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at the moment of his going, which might have been the last time he was to see those two faces, how the faces had looked. There, memory was blank, as it is sometimes at crises, when the intense sensations of the soul obliterate the vision. He heard his feet hurrying muffled upon the earth. He heard over his head, more clearly now, the audible rushing past of the hours. It was indeed the sound of the wind, rising and traveling in the pines above him.

CHAPTER XVI

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ALAS, for the superb moment! His high mood that had set him alone at the head of the world was broken. He was no longer driving men and mountains, and the unconscious forces of the earth like linked horses. He was being driven himself. He was running from something; yet, in fact, he was only hurrying toward the thing he wanted. All the opposition had amounted to nothing. He had gone through it head down. Would he never get past it? Never shake off the effect of it? He was already far on his way. He tried to look forward, to think of what was awaiting him, but persistently his thought rushed back to the scene behind him. It came to him at first not as a scene, but with the memory of the nerves which still felt in their hot current the echoes of the women's voices, strained high in excitement. Those sensations of irritation, bewilderment and confoundment, that had rushed upon him then, instead of diminishing, were growing heavier, stifling reason; and from under their

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cloud he felt intermittently the breath of a hotter feeling, a burning sense of injury—of cruel injustice. Through the thick eddy of emotions, fragments of vision—half memories—began to flash upon him: certain looks of that girl's; certain words; the quick drawing back of lips on the teeth; "You can't!" flung at him like a gauntlet.

What did the woman think he was made for? His smoldering thoughts burst into flame. "You can't!" rapped out on him on the edge of success. The words were as little as a needle point, yet they denied him, and everything he was, and wanted to be. Why hadn't she fought him, heaped him with reproaches, given him something to contend with? But this infernal turning her back on him, and closing her eyes! She did not know him—she couldn't see him—she had never heard of him! He was suffering. Vanity proclaimed itself shrieking, but some spirit deeper in him wept,—the ego, the pervading possessing presence men call the soul, which is for ever looking for itself in some form outside of itself, foredoomed to disenchantment. Where was the mind which had had no thought that was not for him? The face that had been like a rose, now white, now red? It was all an immense fraud practised, a soft-looking surface that, at the first blow, rang iron.

Her face, as he had seen it last, rose clear in

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memory, bleak and white, locked lips, deaf ears, implacable eyes; a mind fixed with devouring pity upon itself. Hateful to think of! There was not an eyelash of hers, a glance, or an inch of her finger that he did not hate. Anything to make her turn again and look at him—if not with worship at least with fear. Any way of beating down the wall of stubbornness, even to breaking her with it, if only he could make her see what he meant. Words would never show. He might clamor at her with words for ever. The exploit was the thing to speak: to appear before her with his adventure achieved; with the spoil in his hands. That would be the unanswerable argument. Everything would be justified by accomplishment! He wanted it accomplished now—instantly. It was unendurable he could not turn on them this moment in his triumph. There was all the journey first, and the struggle—an hour, two hours, the afternoon, when a minute was too long for him. He rode headlong. The Sphinx rose in front of him no longer a sphinx, only a high and senseless mass of stone between himself and his object. No mystery looked upon him, from her forehead, nor whispered to him in the window at her ear. She had become to him the common path by which he reached his goal. He scaled her, reckless in his haste, risking his life on her cruel breast; and, descending on the

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other side, came under shadows of pines, heard the thin voice of the river, and began to run.

Presently the ford came into sight, and in the opening of the trees the outline of a figure. It was Esmeralda Charley, standing, shading his eyes with his hand. Carron came up to him panting. The surrounding, and the expectation it aroused in him were having their effect. Weariness, wrath, aching nerves, wrung by the twist circumstance had given him at the last, were beginning to lose consciousness of themselves in a blaze of excitement. Abreast his man he stopped. He drew out his watch mechanically and looked at it. Half-past two. "Well?" he asked, "how is it?"

"I can't drive him," said Esmeralda Charley.

The words dashed counter to Carron's thoughts. "What's that?" he said. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know," the vaquero replied without emotion. "He won't drive—not like any I ever saw."

"You mean he doesn't move?"

"Oh, yes, he moves—but the way he thinks—like that, like that!" With his fingers he illustrated all directions.

Carron stared. He had never seen so much eloquence in the fellow. "Did you try him with the mares?"

"He doesn't follow."

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The horse-breaker glanced at the corral. At the instant he looked no horses were in sight, but while he looked the chestnut mare broke from the trees and trotted across the enclosure whinnying with high head. She stood at the edge of the water looking over the stockade at the two men. She had almost a human air of being puzzled.

"I'll show you," the half-breed said.

Carron followed him across the ford, and through the trees. On every side were the signs of what he had carried out, the print of himself in the footsteps on the ground, in the strong sides of the corral of which he had glimpses between branches. They turned sharply to the left, and coming into a little break in the timber stood at the gate and looked over it at what was within.

At this upper end of the enclosure were the few groups of pines that had helped to conceal the beginning of the canvas. Here, pressed in among the trunks of the trees, not lying on the ground, yet scarcely standing upright, he saw his captive.

He saw for a flash with that rare impartial eye which perceives the thing neither as it has been nor as hope expects it will be, but as it is in fact, at the moment. He saw Son of the Wind already marked by captivity, soiled with earth, stained with sweat, sick with defiance. He felt as a hunter who

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has taken an eagle. What had caught desire was the proud flight in the air. It was that the man wanted to possess; and lo, fierce eyes and a heap of fury in a cage. There was a lost quality somewhere,—the quality that had most lured possession was lost. Ah, if ever that could be captured, too! Carron thought he could understand the meaning of Heaven. Yet what a body, just as it stood there! What a flow of muscles under the skin! What a threat in the immobility! His hopes shot up like fire. His eye, busy with outward things, thought something unexpected in the prospect before him. He turned angrily to the half-breed. "Why didn't you drive him into the open as I told you, and put up that canvas in front of the trees? How do you think we can lasso him in that thicket?"

"I could not get him out. He would not move. I could not charge him in the trees."

"You never ought to have let him get in there in the first place."

"I could not drive him," the half-breed answered unmoved. "He ran at me, or he ran past me; and I had no one to help."

"Yes, you had. You had that fellow!"

"Oh, him!" The man lifted his shoulders a little. "He went away."

"Went away?"

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"Yes, over there, into the trees, running. He went when the woman came."

"Oh!" Carron muttered. "Oh, yes, yes—yes, of course," he repeated vaguely. He looked at Esmeralda Charley hesitatingly as if he had suddenly forgotten what he was saying. He tried to gather his wits together and go on with it, but one thought stood large before him and blotted out everything else. It had nothing to do with the business in hand, yet in spite of himself the question was on his lips. "What did she do?" he asked.

The half-breed was holding a match to the end of his cigarette. "She came around here where we are standing now."

"Yes, of course—but did she go inside? Did she try to get near him? Did she try to—to—"

The man made a scornful negative motion of the head. "She stood like this." He stiffened himself. "She looked at him as long as this"—he waved the match back and forth once in the air. "Then she mourned."

"Mourned?"

"Like women for the dead," Esmeralda Charley explained, throwing the match away. "She put her face there where your hand is now. She covered her head and mourned."

Carron looked at the spot to which the half-breed

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pointed, the place where his hand lay on the rail; suddenly he let go as if the wood had burnt him. "Stiffen that top timber," he said. "It is weak." Some emotion that he couldn't account for took him by the throat, strangling him, threatening for a moment to master him. "Where is the canvas?" he said as soon as he could gather voice.

The half-breed pointed to where it lay, at one side of the trail.

"Very well. Get me a blanket from camp—a red one. Where's Jim?" He looked behind him. He had not thought of the peon since he had left Raders', but here he was a yard from his heel, waiting. "Get the lassos up here right away. I want the ropes and the saddle, too. Jim can help you. Well, what are you standing there for?" He swung around ready with a blow. "How are we to get through, do you think?"

Esmeralda Charley ran on his errand; Carron looked after him. Why, the fellow had hesitated. He had looked as if he found something strange. Strange, good Lord! There was nothing strange about Carron. There was nothing strange about Carron's giving orders. But it was strange that any one should hesitate to carry them out. Why, what were these for, but to do as he said? Or he, if in this case, he did not know what he was saying? His

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throat was dry. He took a swallow of water from his canteen, threw the bottle on the ground, and threw off hat and coat. He gathered up the canvas and the poles, and, staggering, carried them and flung them down inside the enclosure, at the edge of the trees. There was the half-breed coming back again, still with that expression on his face, a lurking question, a doubt of what was being done. The second vaquero followed. The ropes and lassos were over his arms, across his shoulders, around his neck, more than enough for a hangman. Last into the enclosure, he slid the gates shut.

"Be ready with that stuff, to begin putting it up as soon as I get him out into the open," the horse-breaker said. He took the blanket from Esmeralda Charley, and keeping close to the canvas wall, made a little circuit to the upper side of the enclosure. Here, with his back to the gate, he had the length of the corral before him, sloping a little to the water. It would have been an easy place down which to stampede an army, were it not for the trees directly in front. He dodged here and there, peering for an opening. The mares at the lower end of the corral moved nervously while he moved, but the stallion did not stir. That was strange. The slightest movement in the stockade was usually enough to set all the wild ones in a flicker. Ah, at last he had what

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he had been looking for. From a certain angle the obscuring glimmer of trunks and branches fell away into a narrow open prospect, a sort of aisle through the trees. At the end of it he saw Son of the Wind facing him with head held low.

Carron whirled the blanket above his head, and charged with a shout. The horse stood for an uncanny minute, when the man felt as if he were charging an image. There was only a rod between them when the animal wheeled and broke. He went with leaps across the open, toppling forward as if every bound would fling him, sullenly, with a strange reluctance, a fear of the open that was greater than his fear of the man. At the water's edge, he faced about, dazed to find himself there, to realize the covert of trees so far behind. Carron saw the white of the eyes, the white of the teeth, the sharp edge of hoofs, felt the threatened charge, and charged first himself.

He heard the sounds behind him of the men driving the posts home. He ran back and forth with cries, keeping the scarlet folds flying above his head, keeping the creature in recoil, half backed into the water. Triumph was rising in him. Presently behind his back he heard the half-breed call. He knew what that meant. "All right," he replied, but did not look behind him. Now that he had the ani-

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mal in his power, the horse-breaker's instinct was strong to hold him there. Even with the barrier raised he did not mean to let his captive out of the corner, except by the way that he should determine. He made a feint to charge from the front, swerved before the horse could swerve and darted at him on the flank, setting him off toward the left, plunging around the side of the corral. No need to drive him now. He was flying for his covert of trees, three legs playing the part of four, wallowing like a hulk in the trough of the sea, gathering himself when it seemed that he must be down; then, abreast the canvas, swerving with a snort of terror. Around he went, with head flung up at the barrier, through which or over which he could not see. No trees, no hiding-place left, only the high white blank circle around him, and rock underfoot. His pace grew slower. He ran in a smaller circle, and stopped.

"How about that?" Carron demanded, in an ecstasy of admiration for himself. "Here, Charley, drive those mares down here. We've got to get them out of the way. Open the gate, Jim—wait until they get close—now!"

The flap of canvas slipped to let the chestnut and her companion through, and closed again. Esmeralda Charley stood looking at his employer silently. If there had ever been an expression on his face it was

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there now in a faint shadow of anxiety. "You going to break him to-morrow?" he inquired.

To-morrow? Was there such a thing as to-morrow? "I'm going to break him," Carron answered, "as soon as Jim gets inside the corral with the ropes."

"The second day you never break," the man insisted. "You break the third day. No snow before the third day. Why not break then?"

Carron didn't know why not, except that to the fierce immediacy of his expectations there was no future. Time was not a thing outside of him, passing him. He held it in his hands. "I say to-day—you understand? I break him when I like." He pulled his belt closer, and felt to make sure his spurs were tight. "Bring the ropes," he called over his shoulder, and walked a few steps farther toward Son of the Wind.

The horse stood canted forward as if overbalanced by the great weight of his chest, his feet spread, head hanging, muzzle touching the ground. The dust trembled with his breath. He was shorn of his beauty. He was no longer a thing of outline and undulation. He was mass and weight; thickness—yes, it was that—and power. Menace emanated from the motionless body, promise of infinite resources of strength; strength that might be even be-

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yond a man's control. Had Carron admitted such a thing possible? No, he hadn't admitted, but the idea had caught him before he had foreseen it. There it was. Could a man mount and bridle the wind? A strange little thought touched him. He had never had such a thought in all his life. To die? Was that what Blanche had meant when she had said "You can't?" Then of course he could not go back to her. That would be strange! There had never been a moment when he had not expected to go back to her. His brain had not been able to take in the idea of an end to what was between them, not even when she had screamed those wild things after him, not even when he had hated her. But to die! That was an end he could understand. He had seen other men die, backs or necks broken. He looked hard at the thought of himself in such case and found it didn't trouble him. It was a ghost beside the beautiful reality of adventure.

There was no difference in the casting of a lasso for the least of horses, or the greatest. The rope sang just so, like a long snake through the dust. The ankle it caught was as small as a woman's, but the body leaping and falling was a thing to remember. The sight stopped the breath with admiration. Both ropes, one from either side of the corral, stretched tight in a quivering line, straining out the

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forefoot and hindfoot, kept the creature prone; but a ripple passed continuously down the back; the shoulders heaved, the muscles on the neck swelled as the head struggled to lift itself. Carron's brows were deep in a frown. He had watched with philosophic eyes many horses flung agonizing and terrified, but this was his darling, his one of all. He hated to see that beautiful body wrestling in the dust. "Just a moment, just a moment," he muttered consolingly between his teeth, leaning forward while the vaqueros tightened the knots. Esmeralda Charley, with the saddle, hesitated, and looked at his master.

"What are you waiting for?" Carron said.

The half-breed lifted his shoulders with a faint, resigned shrug. He clicked his teeth hard together as he pulled the cinches around the horse's shivering middle.

"Just a minute, just a minute!" It seemed to Carron that his brain had been repeating that for ever. Always the next minute. Now, at last, before he realized it, he was in that minute—the brief, flashing space of time which he had looked forward to for long. He was seated in saddle. The horse's four legs were under him. Between his knees, the black sides expanded, trembling with a great breath. The creature seemed scarcely to stand, rather to

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hover for an instant between his struggle up from the earth and his bound into the air. Carron found himself borne toward the clouds; felt the back hump under him, the shoulders heave and shake, a magnificent, negligent motion. Only half the strength of the horse went into it, he was so sure of getting rid of the weight. Then, the easy concussion when they touched earth again, alighting with wings, the young fetlocks yielding and springing, resilience running through the whole frame; then the stop, suspension of motion, as the astonished back realized itself still burdened. That was the amazing sensation for the rider—to feel the body shrink and try to shiver away from under him; then, with muscles stiffening, gathering themselves, drawing energy from an inexhaustible source, leap! He was carried upward again, mounting air.

However high and mightily imagination had built, no dream could ever approach this moment of the flaming fact. Nothing he had fancied was like the tremendous stretch and play of the muscles that contracted and extended themselves between his grasping knees; nothing like the sense of strength gathering, gathering itself, increasing doubly with every spent effort. Wonderful to feel that fountain of power beneath power. Leap high as it would it only carried him higher. Yet, for a few minutes it

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struggled with persisting determination to leap high enough to leave him behind. Abruptly all that altered, the aspiring for the clouds, the shaking force, the thundering. The change was as sharp as if a human mind had conceived it. He felt himself carried sidewise lightly. He was swept toward the side of the enclosure as if he were to be carried over it; then away to the other side; then, giddily, rapidly backward. Insane, unimagined movements took him here and there, softly, delicately as if upon feathers! then suddenly, the unexpected excruciating twist and fling that meant to be rid of him.

His brain was working furiously, his nerves at full stretch to meet the brute's guile, his hands and his body ready to counteract, to check, to meet every danger as it sharpened. The abundant energy in him streamed out to the conflict. He was in the furnace of action, at play on the edge of life where love of living is keenest, his blood on fire with the joy of violent motion. All the world around him seemed in motion, the woods waved like a curtain; the canvas of the corral revolved slowly; dark spots floated against it. These were the vaqueros' faces. He had no fear of being unseated. Such fears were years behind him; but a fear he had not thought of before seized him now as the white sides of the inclosure rushed near him on this side, on that. The

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barrier, the work of his hands, which he had thought of as so strong and safe, appeared to him suddenly terribly penetrable. It was in fact no barrier at all, but only a phantom, an appearance of a barrier between the horse and the forest. If the stallion charged it, wouldn't it break like a cobweb? Was this the end of all the bright adventure, to have the prize slip from him and be lost in the hopeless, endless wilderness?

A horror seized him. Why hadn't he thought of this before? How had he rushed so headlong into this position? Why hadn't the half-breed spoken of the danger, instead of staring dumb, with the saddle in his hands? Was he going crazy himself? How was there any danger? In five years no horse had ever tested the resistance of the walls. But a reply leaped, prompt and uncomfortable in his mind. Horses had never been broken in the canvas corral. They had been captured and hobbled here, but they had not been saddled here and mounted. They had never been driven here to the third degree of madness when they cease to see, cease to fear, welcome anything—a dead wall or a descending cliff—rather than endure the will which stays persistently above them.

It was no chance that threatened. It was certainty; it came always, inevitably, the last stage of

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the fight. Carron sensed the approach of it now, the loosing of the one great terror. Memories of former, lesser battles swam through his head; memories of being dashed against stockades of rails and stakes. The dread he had known then of the stout, resisting substance, the crash against it, the injury, the pain, was as nothing to his present dread of being flung against the canvas and feeling it yield like silk. At what moment would this wild birth of the wind stumble upon his freedom? He was courting it as a reckless man courts his death, unaware of how near he comes to it. He would have it now! This was the charge that could not be stopped!

Carron felt himself carried, helpless and light, as a cork on the current. The white edge of the canvas raced for him. The forest behind it marched upon him. He flung his weight back in the saddle, elbows came hard back, knees pressed, and wrists like iron gave the sharp, steady pull at the certain moment. Black trees moved in procession along his sight, and swung away from it; and around came the rocky banks of the stream. The breadth of the enclosure was before him. The body of the horse quivered like a machine suddenly stopped. It had felt the weight of man, the passive, stubborn endurance, but not the terrible assertion of power, the curb. That

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came, a fresh horror. The rider had not time to realize what had happened before he was swept headlong, across the clearing toward the high and ragged bank. The wall of the enclosure concealed it, but Carron knew well enough it was there. He tried to remember how far down the wall extended to the silent, flowing water. The smell of wet moss and earth was in his nostrils. He braced for the fall. He was not conscious of trying to resist it, but, before his mind could grasp such possibility, his greater self had brought it about. He was refacing the arena of struggle. He was dazed, amazed, incredulous with delight. It did not need that there should be walls to contain the frantic creature in the narrow circle. Carron alone held him there. It was a miracle, himself the god. Triumph lifted him to the top wave. He was in control, seated again above the world, anticipating submission.

It came unexpectedly, with a dead pause in the middle of the corral. It was too complete. He suspected. He tightened the grip of his knees. At the same time he heard a voice calling faintly. One of those dark, dancing sparks was giving tongue. He recognized Esmeralda Charley's voice, no word distinguished, only a piercing quality of sound which meant warning. Then the strange sensation. Some large thumb and finger of fate seemed to have

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seized him. He was tossed up and down, now in air, now upon solid ground again, with a grinding shock driving along his spine into his head. After a little his head seemed disassociated from his body, and white stars floated before his eyes. He was not struggling, he was not controlling, he was holding to something, and still he saw the pommel of the saddle jumping beneath his eyes, and a flying rag of mane. Then he was no longer upon a horse, but upon a tower that, for a moment, held itself straight up in the air, then tottered and leaned backward. He was clinging to the under side of it, helpless, spurring.

He heard repeated shouts. He had no thought of past or future, or of anything, but that his hands still held to something solid and living, and would hold to that. Yet all rules and laws seemed reversed. He saw the sky where the trees should have been. The curb that should have been tight flew loose against his face. Dark like a shadow came over him. His knees loosened as the mass descended upon him. His hands opened, and, closing, grasped air.

Gradually he became conscious of dull pain, increasing with return of light. His cheek was resting on flinty substance. He half unclosed his eyes and saw a white level stretching from where he lay.

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A swarm of confused memories rose in his mind. He thought he was lying on the rock above the quicksand. He moved his head, and opened his eyes wider, expecting to see the Sphinx. He saw at short distance a tumult of dust, from the heart of which came sounds like blows. Then a head like a black snake's rose out of the cloud. He saw the ears laid flat, the nostrils expanded thin, the line of the frontal bone showing keen. It had been less pitiful without that look of fury, less terrible without the look of despair. Then a sound shrill and appalling, a voice without articulate words crying on the heavens to witness man. Then the head disappeared. Still the cloud of dust, and, out of it, four feet kicking frantically, struggling with an enemy, invisible, more overpowering than man. Then only a cloud of dust.

Lifted up on his hands, Carron watched this turn and drift like a curtain. There was not the smallest movement behind it now—not a sound. He wondered at the stillness. For so long his ears had been full of the clamor of sounds, his eyes reporting pictures of rapid motion. His brain laboring against odds of cunning and strength. Now everything was quiet, harmless. He could have lain where he was for ever and been untouched. The curtain was drifting lower and growing thinner,

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and through it he began to see the outline of a black lump.

He sat up. The sharpness of the action made him dizzy, and sent pains darting through him. He groaned—not for his own body's sake. A hand came under his head as though he had been ill. A brown face in a black shock of hair was looking anxiously at him. Yet he wasn't ill. He was certain of that. He only felt as though he had been pitched down from one world to another. He took the flask presented to his lips and swallowed what was in it, and waited for nerve and strength. But the reaction was faint. His feet were like lead, his veins were cold. He crawled painfully on hands and knees across the intervening space. His eyes were fixed on the outline which was becoming sharper. Then the veil altogether disappeared. In fact he had entered it, and the thing it had concealed had become strange and plain. It was stretched out upon earth, the four feet extended toward him. They looked large and heavy, and he could see the hollow inside the hoofs. The legs were thin. The curve of the barrel stood high off the ground. He laid his hand on it. It was warm and soft and still. He lifted himself to his knees, and saw what the body had hidden—the sunk neck and the head. A film was on

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the eye, and flowing from somewhere a slender stream of blood.

An ugly thing! A bad thing for her to see! The thought of Blanche sprang live and clear out of the blank of his mind. There was nothing to account for the sudden vision, unless it were that sound he seemed to be hearing, very faint, like something heard in a dream—the sound of some one weeping. A flurry of fear went over him. She must not see it. She had seen it at the wrong time before, and if she saw it again as it was now— No, no, better wait until he had it as he meant to have it! His thought flawed. All his fiery determinations drooped and stopped. All the while he had been watching it, the thing in front of him had not stirred. It looked more inert than the earth it rested on. Yet there was a strange evanescence about it, like a shadow which wanes constantly, imperceptibly. Could all that pulse, that power of motion, escape by such a narrow path as the thin, dark stream which flowed and flowed and settled in a pool in a depression of the rock, and there slowly, by degrees, began to sink out of sight. No way of making the strewn limbs gather themselves and stand upright! No way of wrenching victory from them! The back that had carried him, the neck that had been hot, the feet that had been light, now heavy,

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stiff, motionless, triumphed over him. They had got beyond the reach of woman to release or man to bind.

He let his arms fall at his sides. The sound of the crying was nearer, but it wasn't Blanche's voice. A howl of fear was in it. It was odd that a man should be in fear, now that everything had come to an end. He got up, and stood swaying while the horizon rushed to the middle of the sky, and the sky plunged down and seemed to swing in under his feet. He felt hands groping over him delicately, tenderly. They were the same hands that had raised his head, that had given him the brandy. They seemed to think him an object for pity and consideration. But he could see, he could breathe, his heart was beating; he was conscious in all his limbs of how sound he was. If the earth were shaken to pieces it seemed to him he would remain unharmed, invulnerable, good for God knew how much long living. This solicitude drove him to a fury. He escaped from the pitying hands and started forward.

Some one stood in front of him, not the half-breed this, but that other man who was always in the way to be stumbled over. Carron pushed past him. The man clawed at his elbow and clung close to it.

"What's the use of going back?" he stammered.

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"She won't look at us now! My God! She'll never look at me again!"

"Go away!" Carron said gently. He had cursed the creature before, but now it did not seem worth doing. He shook him off and walked on. The cold waters of the ford curled around his feet. He looked down at them, and saw them flowing—yet they seemed to him to be stagnant, dead. He knew himself to be in the shadow of pines; at the same time it appeared to him they were prone around his feet, shriveled to nothing, dead, leaving him pitilessly exposed under the heavens. Everything had a dual aspect. Even himself. He was Carron, an indifferent Carron who had come to the end of his determinations and desires, Carron still. But there was this other person who was hurrying with such resolution on an errand he would not disclose.

He was a strange fellow. He went as if he had an appointment with himself. There was an oath to be fulfilled somewhere. Carron felt a little curious about it—a vague, mild curiosity, far on the outside. The heart that was pounding on his ribs must be this fellow's. There was nothing that could make Carron's heart beat like that. He wondered, if they went very far together, they might not become friends, and explain themselves, and under-

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stand each other. There was plenty of time for it—an endless amount of time, and nothing but that to put in it. Yet the second person was in haste, and, perforce, he was dragging Carron with him. Time was the solid thing to be walked on, space the chilly, intangible power that wrapped his face and shoulders, stirred his hair, and made him shiver. He had heard there was no end to either of these things, and just as he was becoming convinced of the truth of this, he saw the end. The end was a flight of steps.

He looked at them carefully. There was no doubt about them. At the top of them a white door was open, and that was evidently the door opening out of the known world. His possessing spirit that had brought him here had vanished. He was alone, and felt very tired, but he continued to stand looking up, expectant, without knowing what he was waiting for. It was not for this woman who came and stared at him over the railing, and fled. He did not think he knew her. But it was for this other one who appeared as he had expected, from the open door. She came like a torch carried out upon the dark. Her appearance illuminated everything to him. The past rose up behind him, a vision of heights, with a figure of himself like a giant upon them. There was a brush

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of the wing of some terrific god, and he stood here, tiny, upon a flat, inutile plain. She stood at the top step looking down at him. He knew her, and where he was and why he was there.

"The horse is dead," he said. Her forehead was raised in wrinkles, and her mouth held tight, but she wasn't crying. She didn't believe him, perhaps. "It's dead," he repeated, and sat down on the lowest step and put his hands over his eyes. She came, stood close to him and touched him timidly.

"Never mind, never mind! It doesn't matter!" she said in a trembling voice.

He let his hands fall. "You don't understand," he explained. "It's the horse—it isn't I. There's nothing wrong with me. I am all right."

She began to sob. He felt her arms around his head, her cheek against his forehead and the hot rain of her tears. She said his name, and at first nothing but that over and over, as if it were he only who needed consolation. It did not matter to her, she passionately assured him, it did not matter at all to her that Son of the Wind was dead. She was glad, glad, glad that it was so! It was the only way out for them all.

He regarded her in dreary amazement. How could she lightly dismiss death, that final and terrible fact? What was it that looked so much worse to

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her? She had not been flung down from her mountain! . . . Had she? . . . Now that he thought of it, he was not sure. She had said strange things to him once, when he had not understood them. How could a man know what she meant when it was not real things that moved her, but the thoughts she had about them? He did not understand what was going on in her mind, and he never would. But her shoulder was soft and her eyes, red with weeping and sad, were valiantly for him. Her arms strained around him. There was a fierceness in their grasp, as if she tried to hold something that was far away from her. He seemed to be among the pieces of something that had been his, something as frail and far away from life as one of her thoughts. He left it to her. It was for women to gather up the broken pieces, patiently to fit them together and try to make the figure of Love; breathe in his lips and waken the god from that ghost, the ideal.

THE END

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